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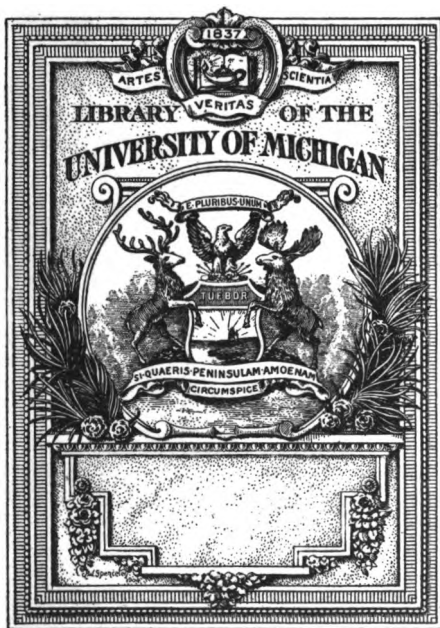
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The Luck of Barerakes

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To
ELIZABETH,
WHO UNDERSTANDS.

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BOOK I

THE SOWING

CHAPTER I

BARERAKES

"DOSTA hear what I say?"

"Hear thee? wair couldn't hear thee this side o' Moortown? thou makes noise enough! But thou canst talk thyself hoarse, or ever thou puts a penny more i' my poke. Let be for a bit, let's have a bit o' peace o' Sundays."

"O' Sundays!" snarled back the elder Heseltynne. "'Sunday' saysta! an' sits there i' thy work-a-day clothes an' thy face unwashen! Much good ha'e Sundays done thee! If thou go to a church, 'tis but to dangle at t' porch-wicket to pick out a new lass as she cooms fra her prayers. And she'd need pray to be delivered fra such as thee—a lazy ne'er-do-weel 'ut can neither steal nor work. Thou'rt thy mother's own son—a poor daft body 'ut was allus crying out again' ways o' getting meat, but ready enough to lick the pan it were stewed in."

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The lazy figure before him stretched itself to laugh.

"Daft thou call'st her ? Ay ! 'tis a right word for a woman 'ut could tie hersell to such as thou art. But they're all daft alike, and a whistle will fetch the bonniest."

"And what good are they, when ye've whistled ? I'd say nowt to it if ye could whistle new stock on t' farm, or good brass again' rent day. But the tune thou'rt whistling'll land thee i' gaol and t' lass on the cutty stool."

"And if I followed thy lead," said the young man impatiently, "it wad be nowt lower than the gibbet. But when I venture my skin it shall be to more purpose than for twa or three half-clemmed yowes."

"As good hang as starve."

"I have thy word for it, but my head's set on neither. 'Tis just here thy talk always ends—'as good hang as starve.' As well risk *his* neck as want a dram mysell'd be nearer thy meaning. 'Lazy ne'er-do-weel' thou call'st me ? When I could ha'e gotten well-paid work thou'd ha'e none o' it. I maun bide by t' farm ; thou couldstna manage wi'out me. And a bonny farm it is and all ! as bonny as thou hast been husband and father."

Heseltynne laughed sourly as his son stopped to take breath.

"She had her way once in her life, an' I never could see where the gain lay."

"Nay, I'se in wi' thee there," said the son hotly. "'Twad ha'e been softer lyin' i' Bridewell straw; and a bairn were better nameless as own *thee* to his father. I reckon she saw clearer before she gave out—poor fool! And 'twas little sense in thee not to hearten the life in her. She ate next to nowt, and worked hard for no wage. While *she* lived we'd a woman to bake and mend for us wi'out fear of her leavin' because thou kicked thy clogs at her for calling thee a drunken sot. And now Betsy says she'll come no more, she's tired o' us and wer ways. 'Tis thy temper and my morals she finds amiss. She's grown particular sin' she took to chapel going. Mother'd ha'e had to swallow both, and say nowt."

"Thou'st been letting her see thou'rt sweet on another lass," cried Heseltynne angrily; "and now we'se ha'e to scrow round for werseln; no decent woman'll bide i' this house."

"Decent! ye ask. Decent! wair cares whether she be decent or no? 'Tis a home-like place thou'lt be sayin': a sober, God-fearin' master, and a peaceful

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hearth ! Decent !—wad anything decent bide i' this house for choice ? ”

He looked round the bare kitchen scornfully, and his father took up the tale.

“ If thou'dst a groat's-worth o' sense thou could'st ha'e smoothed Betsy down, an' we could ha'e gone on as we were. She'd ha'e putten oop wi' my temper and been fain to stay, if thou'd nobbut tickled her ears wi' a lie or two. I dinna ask thee to keep faith wi' her, but a woman o' her age'll believe a lad o' thine against proof.”

“ She wanted her wages.”

“ Ay ! one way or another. 'Twad ha'e been easy work for thee to content her.”

“ Thou'st nobbut one way out o' everything, and that's ower my back. 'Tis I that shall hang for sheep stealin' ; 'tis I maun work late an' early while thou'rt swaggerin' at fairs ; 'tis I'm to be tied to a Bess o' Bedlam when thou'rt wanting the brass to an honest girl's wage. And 'tis I that's to blame for 't all. Thou had'st money once—did *I* spend it ? Thou'dst a wife o' thy ain—did *I* harry her into her grave ? See here !—'tis little enough I gain i' the bargain. I've a roof to my head, I've food to my belly, an' clothes to my back. But if I tried my luck to-morn

I couldn't worsen it ; and not a man i' the township but 'uld say I did right to turn my back on syke a father.

"But what's thy side on' 't ? Dosta see another man 'ut 'uld work for no wage, 'ut 'uld carry no tales, and 'ld put up wi' t' foulest-tongued farmer in all the North Riding for company ? Nay," he broke out again, as he saw Heseltyne open his mouth. "Nay, I've had enough of thy talk for this bout, and'll stomach no more on't. Best sleep werseln sweet ; and if thou hast a plan good for owt let us have it to-morn."

He met the older man's eye with a hardihood that froze abuse, and Heseltyne reflected that it were best not to push the lad too far, since it was true that the farm could ill spare him. Therefore, little as he liked to leave the last word with youth, he put force on himself to keep silence.

And as they sat facing each other on either side the hearth, the young man's thoughts went back over the years that had branded him throughout the dale as the worthless son of a bad father. As far as memory went it was a record of a tyranny so relentless, he wondered he had never before made stand against it. Not until now (when he had

resolved it should end once and for all) had he given much thought to the matter.

And for the first time he thought of his mother—the white-faced slave who had gone to her grave uncomplaining—thought of her with a certain contemptuous pity, as one who had courted martyrdom while freedom and self-respect had been within arm's length. Old jibes of twenty years back came fresh in his memory as he realised that it was for the sake of being made an "honest woman" she had endured slavery unto death. Herein, he believed, lay the superiority of the man's lot above woman's, that wedlock neither made nor marred his "honesty." And yet a Church service that could make a honest man of his father would indeed be a miracle. He laughed at the grim humour of his thought, unabashed by resultant blasphemy across the hearth.

And a poor bargain had it turned out to all concerned. Had she known what was before her, she would have swallowed mere shame and been thankful : so the son judged. The futility of her self-sacrifice would only have shown plainer if it had been given to him to know the truth. That she should have endured all to give her child the name

he loathed to bear, this, had he known it, tuned in perfectly with the sad harmonies of his life.

It was his fancy that a white face pressed against the wet casement from without, but even as he looked the streaming rain seemed to wash away the image.

"A real Back-End night," he said aloud, as he stood up to light his pipe. But Heseltyne, senior had nodded sideways in his chair, and was paying the only tribute he ever gave to the Lord's Day, in uneasy slumber.

Antony took up the candle, holding it to show his parent to advantage. The thin, evil face, fringed with uncombed black hair; the loose, half-opened lips, that showed the white teeth gleaming like those of a snarling cur. The sleeper frowned and stirred uneasily at the near light, and Antony put the candle back upon the table.

"They call him 't' Black Dog,'" he muttered, "and 'tis a right name for him."

As he went back to his seat an uneasy sense of being watched returned to him, but peer as he might through the dark, uncurtained windows, the uncertain reflection of his own face remained the limit of his vision.

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He set himself to plan out new ways for the future : roads that should lead to money and, perchance, respectability, but the chorus from clock and armchair made thought unprofitable.

Once more he stood up and listened, then he crossed to the outer door, and opened it softly, going into the porch.

The rain beat in from the flags, but here, as before, he saw nothing in the darkness.

"Is anybody there?" he called, thinking for a moment to receive an answer in the eloquent torrent of oaths from their own fireside.

"Sneck t' door, wilta!" roared Heseltyne, qualifying his son's conduct with a number of adjectives.

"I thought I heard summat i' t' porch," said the young man unconcerned. "But it'll ha'e been Bess, poor bitch! She'd liefer bide out o' the coldest night as lig within hearing o' thee. 'Tis scarce canny the sense o' the beast!"

"Nights are growing long," yawned Heseltyne, deeming it prudent to pass over his son's sudden truculence. "As well lie like a Christian as snooze o' this fashion." And he went out of the kitchen without further leavetaking.

Antony could hear him stumble up to the stair-

head and shut the bedroom door, and he drew up to the fire, and stirred it into a blaze that lightened the room cheerily, as if it too were freed from restraint.

He relit his pipe, and sat holding his hands to the blaze, for the night was raw, and Barerakes lies open to the north. The wind still howled and moaned round the house and whistled in the chimney, but the patter of rain was over, for the time at least. This made three sudden taps against the pane the more unmistakable. Antony raised his head and waited. Then it came again, and once more he went out into the porch.

"Antony."

"Come into the light and gi'e us a sight o' yer face," he answered doubtfully.

"Is he gone? Art thou by thyself?"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "And wair art thou 'ut canna stand i' the light and out wi' thy business? Coom in wi' thee; 'tis dowlie work hanging about t' door cheek on a night like this."

He laid hold of the shrinking figure by the arm, and drew it into the kitchen.

"So it's thee!"

The girl threw back her shawl, which slipped

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down her shoulders into a soaked heap on the floor.

"And what brings thee here this time o' night, in yon rain and wind?"

"I looked to find thee at t' church stile. I had that I must tell thee. I made sure thy father wad be up at t' alehouse, I slipped home for my shawl, and came straight to speak with thee."

"'Twas thy face I saw at t' window?"

She nodded.

"I was flayed on him."

"And thou'st summut to say?"

"Ay."

The voice was low and uncertain.

"Sit into t' fire and get a bit warmth i' thy blood. Thou maun be fair starved."

Pushing his own chair back from the hearth, he sat so that he could watch her stealthily, turning his eyes away at the least hint of movement on her part.

She had rested her chin on one hand and stared moodily into the red glare. Wet ends of black hair strayed over her forehead, the face had a wan, pinched expression, and though she felt he was watching her, she dared not raise her eyes to his.

Let him ask again what business brought her there, her own tongue seemed tied.

She watched the steam rise from her wet skirts, she counted the strokes of the clock, she waited breathlessly that he should break the spell by some word that should make her task the easier. Yet if it had lain with him he would have chosen eternal silence, and when at last she raised her head and looked at him, he busied himself with his pipe—this to make silence still possible.

"Thou'rt sure thy father'll not find me here?" she began, looking at the door distrustfully.

"Once he's a-bed he bides, and 'tis late."

"Ay, 'tis late, and thou'lt be wondering thyself what brings me here."

For the first time her eyes met his, and her voice broke into passionate entreaty.

"Can'st never guess thyself? 'Tis a hard thing for a lass to bring ower her lips." Then she buried her face in her hands and sobbed quietly.

"If thou canst na guess now, it'll no be a long waiting, and all t' dale'll buzz wi' the truth there's no hiding."

"Thou'st the devil's own luck," said Heseltyn

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slowly, looking across at the crouching figure with moody impatience.

"Is that all thou hast to say?" she asked, with raised head.

"Least said soonest mended, they tell me."

The girl shivered as she drew back. She had told her tale many times in imagination during her wet walk and weary waiting, but it had not been after this fashion. It had been hard, even in thought, to tell the tale that must be told; and yet she had whispered it low, her face hidden from lips that would have kissed away her shame had that been possible. Thus had it been in her imaginings—but here were no sheltering arms, here none stepped forward for his share of the burden. "Thou hast the devil's own luck." "Thou"—as though they two could be separated from the consequences of their sin.

For the moment a hopeless helplessness numbed all her faculties; she felt herself cast out alone before all the world. But as she looked at the cowed, sullen figure a new strength came to her. Who was she to cringe submissively to a man like this?—to carry her shame to him was to have it doubled.

"Thou hast heard what I said?"

The young man looked up at the change of tone. There was a ring of command—of superiority—nay, it might be of threat.

"Arta thinking o' marriage?" he asked, almost appealingly. "'Tis no light thing, marryin'."

"None so easy as lying."

"'Twad be out o' the reek into the fire itself. Thou say'st thou art flayed o' my father—how'lt thou like to sit on the same hasstane?"

The girl kept her eyes on him and waited. It was the only sign she gave that she had heard.

"What can I do?" he went on angrily. "I've neither money nor credit. We'se soon have nae work on wer own farm, and where's t' fool 'ut wad hire me?—me 'ut's nowt but my own name and my father's for good word. If I've not enough brass for t' ring it'll ha'e to be stolen!"

Still she waited in silence, her face turned towards him in a sort of breathless impatience.

Was it after this fashion that his mother had pleaded? She who had had her way once in her life as his father had told him. He shrank at the thought that had come to him unbidden. Nay, he was a better man than his father; but for the

bad luck that had pursued him, a man willing enough to be honest if it were possible. Was he to live his father's life over again? Was Jane to be a second white-faced slaving shadow?"

"I'll marry thee if thou thinkest," he began slowly. The remembrance of their want of a housekeeper rose to his mind. Jane could supply Betsy's place—Betsy, whose improved morals forbade her further service.

Then Jane leant forward.

"'If I think,'" she repeated. "Shall I tell thee what I think?"

Antony waited, silenced by a strange repellant beauty in the girl's face.

"I hold it more of a sin to mate wi'out love than to bear a child out o' wedlock; and thou'st killed my love this night by the man thou hast showed thyself. I have walked in the mire for love, shall I better myself if I lie down in it—hiding my face for shame of what decent folk say of me?"

"I will bring up my bairn myself: never dare tell him the man he has to his father. What's done canna be undone, but I will take his shame and thine for my portion. He need hear nowt fra my lips till he's a grown lad, and if he love his mother

less for the tale, happen it'll save another lass fra undoing."

She stood up, raising her wet shawl from the floor.

"Jane, thou'rt a bit hard on me. And thou'rt makin' t' worst on a bad bargain."

He felt as unfairly treated by her scorn as he had formerly resented her appeal. And the girl paused. The simpler (and as it seemed to her) the lower way was still open to her. So long as the child was born in wedlock the easy morals of the countryside were scarcely outraged. What were her chances of happiness in either path?—the lifelong penance of her vision was at least the nobler. And as she looked at the man she no longer loved, the shame of marriage seemed greater than desertion. By herself, surely, she could outlive and contradict mis-steppings, but to be wife at Barerakes was to take shame to her bosom for a lifelong mate. He would now have drawn her towards him, but she folded her shawl about her, her whole body stiffened in resistance.

"I wad no be hard on thee, Tony; all the more that I've to look mysell for mercy fra God and man. I had walked into a pit but for thy showin'. I

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could e'en be grateful to thee for lettin me see the man thou art, before I'd gone too far for the mending."

He stood with bent head and tied tongue.

"I am wishing thee nowt but good. Wair'd be fainer than I to hear well o' thee? Were I better mysell, I would ask God's blessing upon thee wi' never a thought of bitterness in my heart."

Wrapping her shawl closely round her she went to the door. He heard her soft "Farewell" in numbed apathy, and when the latch snapped it seemed to him as if the door had closed upon all his better possibilities.

CHAPTER II

TWO SISTERS

THOUGH the story I write lives, and is like to live, in folk's memories, yet the dale itself has not seen over a hundred summers go by without change. Those were the days before the railway, before the penny post, when news travelled slowly, perchance gaining in value as it went. It travelled like seeds that the birds let fall, coming from no-whither, yet springing up into matter for all men's wonderment. It was also a day of scarce money and hard work. Pinched hearths were the lot of many a homestead that winter, coming close as it did on the heels of a wet and sunless summer.

And there was hardly a farm in the dale where talk did not greatly centre itself on the coming of McKay the Scot. For if folk were not, by good chance, personally concerned in the affair, they discussed the fate of less fortunate neighbours.

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McKay had come south in the spring to the big Hogg Fairs,¹ and had left sheep on credit. McKay's second coming was like to the Day of Judgment.

Geordie Wilson, calling in at Crossriggs to discuss McKay, found Long Tom from Scar End and old Matt Bentham already settled down to the same tune.

"Coom thou in, Geordie—never stand warming t' door cheek, man! We'se find room for thee, and thou's nobbut a lyle 'un o' the sunniest day."

"Hasta had dealin's wi' yon Scot?" asked old Matt, putting the newcomer at once on to the track of their communings; "they tell me he's as far oop-dale as Borse, an' times to be here for t' market to-morn."

"Ay! so they tell me," said Geordie.

"I should reckon Scars at the Hollow to be as backward as most—didn't they get a good few at t' last fair?—bought him out at t' finish, an' thought theirseln lucky not to be puttin' their hands i' their poke afore Back End."

"'Tes been a dowlie summer for most; what I bought myseln ha'ena paid for their keep, an' Heseltyne's lost nigh a dozen."

¹ Sheep Fairs.

"Heseltyn's had more ill-luck than that; 'tis beyond ken where he finds his rent, but he knaws better nor get behind wi' a landlord 'ut's itchin' to be shot on him."

"He's a bad farmer."

"Bad man an' all."

Geordie sat back disconsolate; not for this had he brought his mind to call in at Harker's. Had it been merely to listen to a string of misfortunes, he'd enough spun and ready for use by his own fireside. The thought of this lost opportunity maddened him almost past endurance—to get the elder Harker by himself seemed to-night beyond possibility, and yet Geordie had come to see in this his last chance of safety. It was for this he sat on with clenched teeth listening to talk that was as salt in a wound, but beyond his silence and preoccupation there was nothing to betray his feelings to those who sat by. And as the evening drew on, his chances seemed less every moment. Sim, Dick and Ben came in from their work; each sizzled in turn over their toilet at the sink, and then lounged in the background wherever they could find a seat. Jane and Lizzie having finished in the dairy, brought their knitting as near to the candles as might be; the talk buzzed forward anew,

"Heseltyn's an owd fool," threw in Dick.

"Or whether a rogue wad be nigher?" suggested Sim.

"Tony's gotten t' best again at the wrestling," said Ben.

"Ay," growled his father, for the lad's enthusiasm seemed to him ill-timed. "Ay!—Trust a Heseltyn to be to t' fore i' fighting or drinking—they're good for nowt else."

Now Ben was his mother's favourite.

"Tony'd ha'e been a good enough lad," she put in, "if his father'd ha'e letten him. I oftens wonder how 'a can stay by t' owd man as 'a does. Many's the time that he's slept oot on t' moor the lang night for fear o' his father; an' him a lyle half-clemmed laddie. He'd coom back fresh¹ fra a fair, an' beat t' bairn for sheer sport till his arm ached; an' when his poor dwined wife came in late fra milkin', he'd curse an' flyte 'ut she'd no gotten *his* wark dune sooner. I was in mysell one evening when 'a was too drunk to unlace his shoon, an' she maun kneel doon wi' a great back-can still strapped to her shoulders. He'd gotten 't band i' a bunch, an' he was too uneasy to wait till she'd loosened t'

¹ Topsy.

budget.[†] There she maun kneel i' the glare o' the fire wi' her poor white face, an' fumble away at his knots (which was bad for t' milk i' t' can, to say no further).

"Ut caps me hoo t' poor body dragged on as lang as she did,—ye can't call 'ut livin'; an' she'd ha'e gi'en oop long enough but for Tony—she'd scarce bear him oot o' her sight. An' 'twas little enough pleasure he can ha'e given her when all's said an' dune."

Here once again did Mrs. Harker take up the cudgels in Antony's favour.

"An' wair could expect ut wi' *his* up-bringin? 'Twas all the way his father had o' bein' pleasant—to tak' t' poor bairn on his knee an' sit callin' an' jeerin' at his mother. He learnt the wee lad to cast foul words at her, an' to laugh an' girn when she fell on a-greetin'."

"Ay! but he loved her sair i' his heart." This came in a girl's uncertain whisper: "Dinna ye mind hoo he cried an' carried on at t' laying-oot?—grown lad though he was. Ut was twa whole days they saw nowt o' him after t' funeral."

"He'll not bide wi' his father a deal longer: he'll

[†] Milk can.

be takin' t' king's shillin', or hirin' out as hind whar folk ken less o' his foreldern. I'se not blame t' lad if a' do—'pon my word I'd as lief house wi' t' Owd One hissell as wi' Black Dog Heseltyne."

"Well," broke in Sim, impatiently, "here ye all sit over ten-year-old tales—is ta nowt fresh i' t' township 'ut ye fall back o' the Black Dog for a heartener? There's Geordie sittin' as glum as a gravedigger, an' Jenny's face 'uld do for a pedler's yard. Cheer oop, ma lass! Lang Tom'll tell thee t' latest fra Scar End. They're a stir-about folk doon dale."

"Nay, I've heard nowt fresh but what she'll ha'e heard hersell lang syne. There's Molly Dean's grannie's none sae blind but she can see wi' t' rest o' us t' sort o' company t' lass has been keepin'. Happen a neighbour's let on. Onyway, blind or no, she's shut her door on the wench." Simon broke into a great laugh.

"Thou'st chosen thy tale rarely for oor Jenny! 'Tis nowt sets her face sourer than to hear o' a light lass."

"Hast a head aboon kissin' at thy age? Nay, my lass! it fits ill wi' young lips. Mebby soom day'll coom a lad 'ut'll gar ye think different! Hasta

never heard tell o' the man wha'd look at nowt lower than t' stars till his foot met a stone i' the roadway?"

"Let the lass be," said Wilson angrily. He was so near Jane he could feel her shoulder tremble. "A girl's never the waur for havin' an old head o' young shoulders."

"An' she's i' t' right of it," said her mother. "T' lasses ha'e only theirseln to thank to believe syke tales as they do. There was folk enough warned Molly whar it 'ld end; but she'd gang her ain gate for them all, an' maun drink as she brewed."

"I reckon 'tis like bringin' a naked light to a hay mow," said Harker thoughtfully. "Fowk aye think theirseln turbel clever i' t' forehand, an'll trust theirseln to be less careful than t' rest. But there's a deal canna be taken into account wi' t' handiest o' us; 'tis a sure-footed man never slips."

But his wife saw that Lizzie had dropped her knitting, and she found the mild prudence of his philosophy but a poor safeguard for younger heads. The resultant pains of ill-doing have ever been judged insufficient warning, without the spicier background of eternal fires.

"An' wair'd pity him if he cam' round cryin'

over his losses ? ” she asked drily. “ But a lass has her fling—keeps a deaf ear when her outwardly ways are the text, an’ when pay-day cooms round she creeps home wi’ her hands to her face an’ says she’s been deceived. ‘ Deceived,’ I’ll warrant ye ! Deceived as much as a bairn has that puts his hand to t’ fire to see for himsell if ut burns. Follow thy sister, Lizzie, an’ keep clear o’ foolishness ; ye can’t drown wi’out watter, an’ them ’ut stand i’ a reek get sore een.”

Lizzie was counting her stitches, her head bent near to the candle, but Long Tom saw her smile.

“ Ut blows colder to-night,” said old Harker, “ an’ I look for a change i’ t’ weather before morn.” As he spoke he went to the door and looked out, and Wilson made this his opportunity. Pushing out of the circle he, too, went into the porch, and the door closed on the two, muffling the sounds of a low-voiced parley.

“ I should judge Geordie’ll be hard hit wi’ last summer,” said Matt Bentham, in half tones. “ He farms nigh t’ wind at all times, and rent-day will ha’e pretty well cleared him out.”

“ He was on at t’ lord’s new agent for a drop in the rent. But he’s a stiff new broom, and cares for

nowt in his road. 'Tis a clean sweep wi' Mr. Palmer, and if t' farmer be swept along wi' t' rest 'tis little odds. Towd agent 'uld ha'e kenned bettther nor to dry oop Geordie—he looks well to t' land."

"And now there's t' Scot to pay, and his wife near her time. 'Tis a bad look-out for poor Geordie."

The company started guiltily as the door opened, but Harker came in alone. Geordie had not told his tale in vain, but the point was to hand over the loan with all the secrecy that pride could desire, and Matthew Harker was a poor actor.

"There might easy come snow before morn," he said deliberately, as he fumbled in the depths of a lead tobacco-jar that stood in the darker recesses of the stair-cupboard. "I'll away up to yon cow afore bedtime."

His wife, listening carefully, was satisfied that no chink of coin gave outsiders a clue; but Simon, being a man of little tact, burst out testily—

"I bedded her warm t' last thing before I coomed in—she wants nowt."

"Ay, lad," said old Harker soothingly, as he lighted the lanthorn, "'tis merely a matter o' interest,"

"Nay, Matt—never get up yet," cried Dick; "ye maun gi'e us a scrape o' the fiddle afore ye gang. Play us a jig, man! Tom and Sim'll put in time wi' their heels. Sure it is time we had summut more lively than yon dowlie talk."

And he had his way for a while, but in those days folk went early to bed to save candles. There was, moreover, a suspicion of unreality in their merriment. Geordie's silent melancholy had left an influence that even Dick and Lizzie could not dispel.

When the girls went up to the little room they shared, Lizzie's tongue was loosened for complaint. She, for one, saw no good in folk stepping in of an evening if they brought such unlikely talk. How, she asked, could the cheerfulest family bear up against the collected woes of the neighbourhood, against Geordie, sitting as choof as a half-drowned cat, against Sim's tactless gossip? Remonstrated with about Geordie, she allowed a man in his position might, with excuse, be dull company. But what ailed Tom that he must drag in Molly's doings before the mother? He might have known what sermon was bound to follow.

"Though it gave her a chance to crack thee up, so doubtless thou's beholden to Long Tom!"

Long Tom, it seemed, was at fault on all hands. If her sister had not the spirit to resent his thinly-veiled sneers, she herself would pay him back with interest after a plan of her own inventing.

"He'd no right to mention thee in the matter—least of all mixed in wi' kissin' and star-gapin'. But I've a plan i' my head," she added darkly. "If 'a thinks 'a can coom round me o' this fashion, 'tis a misreckoning he'll remember."

Here she stopped short, shutting her mouth with a snap. She was telling Jane more than she intended, for, hitherto, the warfare 'twixt Tom and herself had been wholly between the two. Therefore, before Jane could question her, she was off on another tack.

"I could scarcely keep a straight face when t' mother was on about kissin'! She's given me a longer tether than she knows when she tells me to follow thee!" Here her voice broke into soft laughter. Eh, Jennie! I willna tell—dinna be flayed I should tell! But 'twas more nor a handshake Tony took last home-coming!"

She waited the result of her thrust, but Jane had no answer, and in the unlighted room her face told no secrets.

"And sin' 'tis thee I maun follow, thou might tell me if kissin' cooms natural?"

Lizzie laughed again for sheer light-heartedness, untinged with malice.

Then, because it was no fun to tease a statue, she danced across to the window, and flung two bare arms round her sister's neck.

"Thou'st no call to be angered wi' *me*. Was it my fault Tony took what 'a wanted within earshot? And wair'ld blame him or thee? Mother hersell will ha'e tried all sorts in a lifetime, or how comes she to be so turbel knowing?"

Even in the dim light of a clouded moon she could see the settled sadness of the dark eyes, and her heart smote her.

"I meant nowt, and less than nowt, wi' my talk—thou shouldst have more sense than to take owt I say amiss. Thou know'st right well I think more o' thee than them all; and t' mother might hold thee up for a pattern while she were hoarse—I'd like thee none the worse for't."

"'Tis a poor pattern, God knows!"

"Now thou'rt off again!" her voice warming with indignation. "Not content wi' bein' perfect, thou maun worrit theesell ower what are no sins

at all for fault o' bigger. 'A poor pattern,' thou sayest? I want not a betther."

Jane loosened the clinging arms gently.

"I'm thinking 'tis now like it was wi' thy first sampler. Bairn and lassie, thou'st not been one to count thy stitches by other folks' measurin'." She spoke slowly for her own comfort.

"Thou'lt mak' thy own pattern, and 'tis better than a fair copy of a poor best."

"I'm not wanting to outbid my betthers," said Lizzie saucily. "What's good enough 'for thee'll fit me ten times ower."

Then she laughed again, for it was not her way to be long serious.

"And sin' thee and Tony's led the dance, I've nowt to do but to follow when t' way opens! . . . Coom away to bed wi' thee! Never stand shiverin' there when thou might lig warm. Why! thou's not loosened thy gown. Art a going to bide up all night?"

A moment later the voice continued, more muffled, "I wish 'twere as easy getting out o' one's bed as gettin' in! Talk about makin' yer bed and lyin' on't; I've never seen t' bed 'ut I couldn't hae ligged in longer than I was letten bide!"

CHAPTER III

THE ALEHOUSE

GREY hills and a grey sky, grey stone walls on either side of the grey road—nowhere, as far as the eye could reach, could be seen any positive colour.

Tony's own clothes had acquired in a long lifetime the same sober hues as the countryside. Like the sheep and the grouse, his coat toned in with the surroundings, and proclaimed him native. There was nothing kenspeckle about him. A stranger in the hill country shows up like a seagull driven inland by weather. The bird an omen of storms, the man, as often as not, to be regarded with suspicion, and watched until further developments.

Tony was swinging down into Wrathe, his mind set on many matters, but most of all on getting home for milking betimes.

Wrathe, grey like the rest, was perched on a hill ; a double line of houses by the roadside, widening

out at one point for the Market Cross. Wrathe called itself a town by virtue of this same cross, and boasted three alehouses and a grey-towered church among its inconsiderable buildings.

In Wrathe itself Tony had no concern ; it lay on his homeward way, and such business as he had in the village had been done in the morning. The one street twisted bare and empty past low, irregularly built stone houses facing each other in gloomy silence. The day's work was over or in abeyance. Folk would be sitting over the evening meal, and he reflected with some complaisance that, having cajoled Betsy into continued service, he would not be returning to the cold fireside of an unkempt house. In the bleak October twilight the thought of fire and warmth, even on an otherwise cheerless hearth, had its full value.

Wrathe seemed asleep, not a dog or cat stirring, the one sign of life or movement being the curling wreaths of peat smoke from the chimney stacks. The sound of his clogs on the cobble path called Antony's attention to the silence, and he drew therefrom his own conclusions.

"I maun be later nor I thought for, and if I be late, ten minutes will make no odds."

Taking a slanting away across the street, he stopped at the door of an unpretentious alehouse, stood a moment flicking at his leggings with his stick, and finally pulled at the latch and went in.

The "Black Heifer" went to no expense in a formal bar ; folk took their liquor in the "house" or kitchen. It is more than doubtful whether any of its customers would have consented to sit elsewhere had other provision been made. And a handy kitchen it was : a great hearth at the end, a settle on either side, and wall benches to seat late comers. There was also one rocking-chair, never occupied except by old Peggie the landlady, or at her special, and most flattering, invitation. A queer old harridan this same Peggie, with a skin like parchment, eyes like cold steel, and scant wisps of grey hair pushed back under a dirty linen cap. Over her own domain she reigned supreme and unquestioned, a somewhat foul-mouthed tyrant of whom all stood in dread. Her power lay in this, as well as in her more habitual attitude of complete indifference. Pay Peggie her dues, keep your fingers out of her concerns, and your legs out of her way, and she was civil enough. You might break the Ten Commandments severally and collec-

tively; Peggie went about her business totally unconcerned. But let her once be annoyed, whether by incivility or inadvertence, and she had a way of concentrating her whole attention for the moment on you and your career. She gave any such unfortunates her candid opinion at length in the tersest Saxon. Long-forgotten backslidings were recalled, remote ancestry besmirched, faults in appearance exposed. No detail escaped Peggie, and to stand up to the storm was mere foolhardiness; he came off best who slunk out of the door at the first sign of foul weather, even though he must leave his ale untasted. Notwithstanding all this the "Black Heifer" had its undenied attractions; the ale was no worse than elsewhere, the standard of manners and morals was not exacting, and the kitchen had the convenience of two exits, an advantage readily recognised by its most regular frequenters.

Old Peg looked at the newcomer for half a second, but went on cutting collops of ham with scarcely a break. As his eye met hers she jerked her head towards the fireside almost imperceptibly, and clearly more in warning than invitation.

Heseltyn's eyes wandered over the company, to

linger on the bent red head of a stranger. Looking back at Peggie, it was revealed to him that this was McKay, the long expected. Tony himself had had no dealings with the Scot; 'twas not often the Black Dog relished his son's companionship on fair days. Tony's part was either to bide at home or to dangle his heels at an appointed tryst to take home the cattle. But here, clear enough, was McKay; why seated high in honour in Peggie's own chair was not quite so clear, but ample matter for cogitation.

The fireside was full of farmers, and among all the talk the foreign tongue of the drover bit in clear and unmistakable. He was feeling himself a man of consideration. Matt Thirkell had introduced him to the rights and privileges of the "Black Heifer," and its retiring simplicity commended it to the Scot. Matt sat at his left hand, a man who asked intelligent questions, and who showed himself impressed by the simplest information. It was a cosy fireside, the whisky was tolerable, the company cheerful and socially disposed. McKay talked and laughed; he was indeed unusually complaisant. His wanderings were nearing their end, his pocket was well lined, and, though he collected dues for

others besides himself, yet what with his own, and what with percentages, he had made a tolerable penny one way and another. He sat there warm and comfortable, hungry enough to watch the frying collops with interest and anticipation, though not with that edged appetite that brooks no delay.

As Tony approached the hearth the stranger turned his head and looked at him keenly. He had a memory for faces, but here was a new one in his experience.

"An' wha's this lang-legged chield?" he asked good-humouredly.

He had leant his head back against the high chair to look well at this newcomer. He was not unwilling to show a knowledge of the countryside and people; the path of the money collector had need be softened by whatsoever goodwill he can attach, and an interest in and knowledge of the men with whom one rubs shoulders is as easy a road to popularity as one can find.

Peggie brought the young man his ale.

"Not to know Tony!" she exclaimed; "an' yet I'll warrant ye'll ha'e had dealin's wi' his father, t' Black Dog, as they call him." She saw a frown gather on Antony's face at this informal introduc-

tion. "Antony Heseltyne I should hae said ; has a name far an' wide wherever t' lads be for wrestling. There'll be nobbut a finger-breadth between ye for height. 'Tis a weel-grown lad, is Tony."

The Scot drew in his legs and looked approvingly at the young man. He himself was proud of his inches, and not deaf to the flattery implied by Peggie's words.

"Stan' back to back, man !" cried Matt. "I'll lay McKay's t' betther, baith i' height an' girth."

Antony stood as before, his ale mug in one hand, and his face indolently defiant.

"Back to back's no the test," he said slowly. "'Tis face to face 'ut a man shows what 'a's worth."

The Scot laid a great hand on either chair arm, raising himself slowly as he answered—

"I'll no say ye're not right i' the main, yet it will be shoulder to shoulder an' back to back for gude friends."

It seemed to Antony that looks passed between Matt and Peg, and, used as he was to the atmosphere of the "Black Heifer," he gave a shrewd guess at the matter debated. Already he had divined no friendly hospitality in Matt's genial companionship and Peggie's smooth tongue. Now

his thoughts leapt a stage further. If he and the Scot could be egged on to disagreement, the chance that sent Tony the wrestler was a godsend to the folk who sat round with treachery in their hearts, but neither the courage nor skill that could further their wishes. He might play the cat's-paw. In any trouble that might follow thereby, who would say anything but that Tony Heseltynne was at his old tricks, and that this time he must pay to the end? For himself a turn with the Scot had been welcome; he would be glad to show a foreigner the Dale's metal, and win for himself yet another record. But as his eye met the other's steady glance he swore to himself that here was too good a man for their plans. It was not the fair odds of the ring. At any moment some other might step in, sure that Tony would have to stand to the reckoning. The Scot would be silenced, but there would not want for a crowd of witnesses. His mind was made up in the moment; he turned his back to McKay, standing his full height stiffly.

"Good friends let ut be, then," he said shortly, and he smiled engagingly in the circle of faces, which looked up in disappointment.

"Thoo talks o' tests," flung in Thirkell with

ready contempt, "an' thoo stands there content to be betthered. Eh, lad, can't tha' pull thasell together a bit for t' honour of the dale? Thoo beant like nowt sae much as a sack o' meal set down by a wall-side. For God's sake, put tha shoulders back, an' try an' look summut like a man, thoo girt göavissen!"¹

"'Twad be a lyle matter to show thee wair was liker a meal-sack," flung Antony scornfully.

"Ay! thoo talks big to a man owd enuff to be thy father," put in a new voice. "'Twad be more to t' purpose to stand oop to a man o' thy ain size. What's ta proppin' thasell *there* for?—for a' t' world like a cuddy² tied to a post! We've a' seen this lang-syne, 'ut McKay outtops thee a head an' more. Sit thasell doon, laddie, sit thasell doon; 'twill be time enough braggin' when thou'st nowt but lassies to hear thee."

Heseltyn's eyes glared menacingly.

"Put tha mug doon, lad—I'se too thrang to be scrowin' round after thee wi' a clout." Encouraged by shouts of laughter Peg continued, "'Tis a pity to spill good ale, and I'll warrant thou finds ut easier to drink nor to pay for."

¹ Booby.

² Donkey.

Turn where he would, there was nothing but sneering and jibes; the Scot himself could not but smile at this panting figure of outraged dignity.

A word and a blow had always been Antony's rule. Those who knew him best wondered to see him gulp down his ale in silence. A touch more, thought some, and the scrimmage would be general, and the Scot alone unprepared for what would follow.

"Peg's i' t' right of ut," cried another. "Pence are scarce oop at Barerakes—Tony's wise to mak' sure on t' ale. 'Twere a thousan' pities if 'a were forced to lap it oop off t' flags jus' for wantin' t' siller for new."

"Yeer father'll be none too blithe meetin' McKay."

"Hoo've ye coomed off wi' owd Heseltynne and t' hoggs 'ut ye sowld him? Ye may think yeersell lucky if ye get a tithe o' what's due to ye."

A buzz of such talk went forward. Each man thought of some new taunt, which, whether addressed to Antony or no, stung him like so many whip-ends.

And now, at the word money, the canny Scot

pricked up his ears. Heseltynne was the name ; a chorus of voices informed him of the relationship between this alehouse butt and the man on his list of debtors. 'Tis human nature to mould one's behaviour by public opinion. Who, seeing this man standing angrily silent amidst such a rattling fire of taunts, could take him for aught but a poor-spirited braggart, the butt of men weaker than himself ? The Scot knew himself for a prudent, peace-loving man, yet to stand there after this fashion showed a poltroon's patience. The contempt he felt showed itself subtly in his tone as he bade Antony warn his father that he, McKay, looked to a payment of just debts on the morrow at Thordale market. He added, gratuitously, the hope that the father would e'en be a better paymaster than the son was fighter.

And Peggie declared herself never so capped as when she saw Tony fling down the price of his ale and leave the last word with the Scot. That Heseltynne was no coward she knew as well as the rest, but that he should have had the wit to avoid thrusting his head into a net so excellently laid was indeed matter for wonderment. She looked after the lad as he strode off, without a

hint of malice in her disappointment. He had proved himself too clever a man for her to regret his escape. Let the others work out their wills, and stand or fall by the results ; to herself she saw no danger, blow the wind as it might. Her heart warmed towards Tony. It would have been a thousand pities if he had hung for the lot.

So she took the Scot up sharply when he laughed at the youth for a milksop.

"'Tis no *Tony* 'ut's gotten t' worst on it," she said tartly. "An' ye'll be warned by me ye'll be keepin' syke pleasantries as yon for yeer own country, if ye look to die quiet i' yeer bed."

"Troth, good wife, I find ye an unco' patient folk. 'Tis a gey few o' our lads but wad ha'e been fingerin' the dirk for half his heckling."

As a hint to Tony the comment was useless, since he had banged the door behind him and stood breathless with rage in the chill dusk, bent on putting distance between himself and his tormentors. He turned mechanically to the left and had hurried some yards before he found himself at fault at the end of a blind alley. Muttering curses at his mistake, he turned on his heel, and was at some pains to retrace his steps

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as quietly as might be, since he must pass the kitchen windows on his way to the open road.

He need not have feared observation. The group by the fireside was too busy laughing to heed the noisiest footfall. But for his further safety he left the flagged path that kept by the house wall and stole gingerly through the mud of a neglected yard. And in so doing he came, unobserved, on the figure of a man who stood craning his neck forward in an attitude of watchfulness, staring intently, so far as Antony could judge, into the inn windows. Something in the pose struck him familiarly, and he stopped short in the shadow of a tipped-up cart to make good his suspicions.

The man looked round him stealthily and crept nearer the wall; his profile showed clearly against the now lighted windows. Antony whistled under his breath, and was moving on when a sudden thought struck him. He crossed cautiously to where his father stood and laid a hand on the Black Dog's arm.

"Dinna gang in," said Tony.

"Curse thee!" whispered his father petulantly, not forgetting his caution even in this unlooked-for

encounter ; " what gars thee creep oop behind honest men like a damned watchman ? "

Antony hung off sulkily, but to-night there were folk he hated even worse than his father, and to let the Black Dog go in without warning would be to play into their hands.

" Dinna gang in," he repeated. " There's McKay. An' they've all soom plan i' their heads 'twere best to keep clear on."

" May t' devil fetch them an' thee ! " was the hot answer ; but the next moment he clutched Tony convulsively. " Seetha ! Seetha ! " he hissed, pointing in at the window with a hand that trembled with excitement.

Growing bolder the two crept nearer, Antony's head bent to the level of the other. Standing outside in the chill darkness the picture within glowed with added warmth and colour by contrast.

The Scot stood apart from the rest, and the louder tones of his harsh voice reached the Heseltynes in grating snatches. He seemed to laugh and talk with the open-hearted sociability that with a Scotchman spells whisky.

" Peg maun ha'e gi'en him summat stronger nor we get for oor money," commented Antony.

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"See the gold i' his hand ; he's payin' for drinks all round."

"I wonder thou shouldst bide here, when there's owt can be drunk for nowt."

"Dosta think, Tony lad, we could 'tice him oop home wi' us ?" said his father persuadingly.

"And what then ?" The voice was tersely antagonistic. "Didsta think thou couldst get him dead drunk ? Syke as him can drink endwis and yet keep their wits clear. If 'a get beyond talking 'twill be nowt to the purpose : as like take a bone fra our Bess as gowd fra a Scot."

"Whisht ! lad. Whisht !"

Antony read in the greedy gaze that the Black Dog could not give up the hopes that had come to him, and he made a last effort at convincement.

"If the Scot lived he wad tell ; if *he* couldn't talk others would ; an' t' gibbet's the end ony gate. And what is the man to thee ?—dosta think them 'ut took him in yonder'll gie oop their right to his pickins' ? They were talkin' o' thee, and warnin' McKay it were nigh t' last guinea at Barerakes. If thou'rt behind hand wi' thy money, there be quieter spots for beggin' off than owd Peg's kitchen."

Antony might have saved his breath for all the impression he made. Heseltynne was watching the Scotchman, and his son's warning, so far as he had been concerned, was a ripple of meaningless sounds.

The young man laid a hand on his arm, thinking to lead him away, or to compel attention, but the Black Dog shook himself free with an oath.

"Gang home," said the son.

"Gang to hell !" answered Heseltynne.

"As thou please," said Antony, giving up the struggle. "And 'twad puzzle a lawyer body to ken hoo they differ !"

CHAPTER IV

MISTS DRIVEN BY A STORM

THE night, though gusty and threatening, still kept fair. Black, ragged-edged clouds scudded across the sky, the wind howled in snatches, but between came intervals of even more ominous silence.

Jane closed the door softly behind her, standing to wrap her shawl more closely round her head when she had satisfied herself that nobody had followed her. As soon as her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness she picked her way along the yard and out into the lane. Beyond the wall-end the wind swept through the garth gate with a force that almost lifted her off the ground, but as she struggled up the hillside the belt of firs that stands above Crossriggs broke the full strength of the gale. The wind might howl and roar in the tree-tops, along the wall-side she went in shelter.

The road and the fir wood climb the hill together

as far as Brow pasture, where the fir-trees end, and the cart track bears to the left for Shunner, a scattered hamlet higher on the fells. Leaving the friendly shelter of the trees, Jane had to turn eastward in the teeth of the gale. Hurried as she was, she found it was time saved to go slowly, for the path was easily missed, and the steep turf banks on either side slithered away oozily from under her feet. It was a hard struggle against the wind across the length of Brow pasture and Syke Sidings until she came more into the shelter of the trees that shut in Black Syke Gill. Above the roar of the wind she could hear the thunder of dashing water in the Forss below, and she thought to herself that half of her journey was accomplished.

Two more fields brought her to the stile where the path runs down to the little stone bridge near Black Syke Mill. The wind had fallen for a moment, and she paused in the strange silence. At her feet she could hear the trickling rustle of thousands of tiny runnels of water in the soaked hillside. Following the trend of the land, they would gather into minute water-ways, and, gradually wearing and widening a channel, would join the beck itself, and so flow down to the sea.

"They canna help, once they are started," thought Jane, following the parable in her mind. "Happen one has a choice i' the first step, but once in the stream ye maun gang."

Between the driving clouds came the light of the rising moon. It would be lighter for her home-going, but whether this was wholly to her advantage was another matter.

She went her way slowly, turning over in her mind the likeliest end to the quest she had undertaken. Chance that morning had taken her into Wrathe. Chance again had brought her face to face with Antony Heseltyn, and in this chance meeting half-formed doubts and regrets had leapt to conclusions. She had found herself asking that he should give her a meeting, though hitherto this had been Antony's part. Had he shown himself unwilling, she would have lowered herself yet further to plead, but at the first word he had nodded a perfunctory acquiescence. She herself had arranged the place and time—'twould be too risky, she told him, for him to be seen near Crossriggs. Black Syke Barn lay on the nearest way to Wrathe, and, if she chanced to meet any one, an errand to the shop would explain

all. It had been done in a moment. She had stopped with her breathless demand ; he had nodded his answer. With eyes that watched for possible observers she had appointed the place and time, and he had given his word not to fail her. They had parted as suddenly as they had met.

Now, as she neared their meeting-place, she sought vainly after words with which to approach him. He would not be likely to help her out, she judged, since the initiative had rested solely with herself. A narrow stone block bridged the stream near the mill house. Many a time as children had the two sisters "wished their wish" in blind faith that many disappointments could not wholly weaken. It had been Tony himself who had taught them. "When ye stan' on a stone 'ut spans a beck, whatever ye wish in yeer head will come true." "Nobbut one wish a time," he had added. "An' ye maun never let on what it is to a soul, or it'll jus' work t'ooother way on." And the truth of this last had been proved—for had not Jane by threats and blandishments wrung from Tony his most frequent wish ?

"Thou canst tell me i' a whisper at t' back o' t' schule-house," she had told him wheedlingly.

"There'll nobody hear i' *that* noise. And as we gang home thou canst wish it t'oother way round oot loud, and thou'lt get what thou wants onyway."

So she had had her will. Behind Wrathe school-house, with the unruly little band newly loosed and at their noisiest, Tony had whispered in her ear his ambition. Later on, the same day, he had done pilgrimage to his altar; he had danced on the bridge-stone, and, since the spoken wish worked by opposites, he had called in a clear voice, to be heard of gods and men—"I wish that t' moother'ld die, an' leave t' father an' me i' peace by werseln." Yet though the two little girls stood hand in hand in awed silence, and though Jane had promised herself to repeat the original wish when "nobody could be jealous,"¹ it was clear, by after events, that the powers were not to be hoodwinked after this fashion. So to-night Jane's feet lingered almost mechanically on the narrow way, and the wish in her thoughts clung to vagueness. "Let me but get what I'm wanting, an' I care not what I've to pay, or how it be got."

Once Black Syke Mill was reached there was a clear cartroad to Wrathe, and the night had

¹ Suspect anything.

grown perceptibly lighter as the moon rose. As Jane splashed and stumbled along the dirty lane she could see Black Syke Barn ahead on her left and the end of her wanderings.

Fumbling at the chain of the gate fastening, she passed into the paddock. There was no one there—Tony, as we know, had been delayed—so, choosing the most sheltered side of the barn, she cowered against the wall, her shawl drawn tightly about her. Leaning back her head, she watched the black clouds drive past the eaves, and listened to the far-away murmur of the mill-race. She had given over searching for words and pleas; indeed, unless the patient watching for a particular star to shine through succeeding rifts in the clouds could be called thinking, she did not even think. Had it been warm she would have fallen asleep; as it was, she kept her eyes fixed on this one point, and stood motionless, her back against the wall and her feet in the long, wet grass.

Antony came close up to the barn before she noticed his approach, and he stood for a moment, uncertain if she were there.

"Jane," he called in a whisper.

She turned her head quickly, and stood upright.

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"I've kept thee waiting, I doubt, but I couldn't get off before. Art a long here?"

"Ay—no—indeed, I dinna ken rightly how long it is; I wasna thinking how t' time went. Is't late?"

"Gettin' on."

There was a short silence that seemed long to Heseltynne; then the girl spoke in a low, clear undertone: "I asked thee to meet me because I've been thinkin' thy words over, and I'm none sure I was right."

"I'm not complainin'."

She went on as if she had not heard him. "Last night there were neighbours stepped in, an' Long Tom fra Scar End wad talk about Molly Dean, an' *I'd* to sit by an' hearken to them all an' their judgments. Ay! an' that wasn't t' worst; poor mother maun needs hold me oop to Lizzie as a saint an' a patthern—'Follow thy sister, Lizzie,' she said, 'an' keep clear o' foolishness.' Canna think hoo my cheeks burned? Oh, I canna gang through wi't, Antony—I canna, *I canna*. I had thought my back braider than it is, but I canna."

"Thou blows hot an' cold."

"'Tis no for my ain sake; but when I think o' Lizzie I fair tremble. She's such a merry heart,

'ut clings sair by the folk she loves—I dursn't let her see hoo little worth the carin' I am. Such a good heart it is ! A many wad ha'e thought theirseln ill done by to be aye havin' their sister held oop as a law. Thou'st heerd thysell hoo t' moother'll praise me sky-high ; an' 'tis none sae long syne that I took it as nowt but my dues."

"Thou had'st allus a good conceit o' thysell," assented Antony.

He held himself aloof from her sorrow, partly through want of comprehension and partly through pique. Among the burdens and responsibilities of his life he had not numbered those that hang by the possession of a good name. None had set Antony Heseltynne on a pillar, making his virtues the measure for other folk's shortcomings. Since the previous Sunday the whole tenour of his experiences and feelings had been leading him towards contented acquiescence. He had offered Jane marriage, and she had flouted him, crying out against the man he had shown himself to be. His offer had been made unwillingly (the greater the merit), with a full consciousness that it was better than she could have hoped for, better than he had ever contemplated, since he had not for

a moment considered his possible responsibilities. If she had imagined him a better man than he proved himself, the fault was entirely her own, since he could not recall any reasonable ground for such expectation. His own opinion of himself fell on the lines of Mrs. Harker's justification, "Who could expect more from his upbringing?" and, knowing yet better how the shoe pinched the wearer, he held to the belief that many well-thought-of lads would have come through less creditably had they been saddled with such a father. Other men in the dale, sons of decent parents, had been guilty of this same sin, nor had public opinion dealt hardly with them. Jane's intolerance of his apathy was all of a part with her self-conceit. Having proved herself no better clay than her less fortunate sisters, she still claimed a higher respect and value. Nay, her assurance had been such that she had not claimed in vain. He had stood browbeaten and ashamed before her scorn, giving in to her decision when he would fain have kept her as his own. In the cool daylight he had wondered at those feelings, saying to himself he might well be thankful for his freedom; and yet a soreness remained, and Jane beyond his reach seemed suddenly more desirable.

But for all that, his had been a growing philosophy as the heat of his admiration had cooled. She had given him scorn and hard words, when she should have been grateful. His offer to make amends should have amply atoned for his share in the fault, yet she had told him roundly she but held it added disgrace to bear his name. That being so he could only shrug his shoulders and think himself well out of the business, taking her answer as final.

Want of a housekeeper might have served as an excuse for marriage in the Black Dog's eyes, but since Sunday, by threats and caresses, Betsy had been persuaded into further service. As he stood in the chill air and listened to Jane's passionate complainings he wondered he had weakly consented to their meeting. The question had been settled for the best, take it all round—for his best, that is—and talking couldn't better it. Least of all such talking as this.

Lizzie! What was Lizzie, that she loomed so important in this matter of her sister's? In comparison to Lizzie it would appear that Jane and himself were but by-characters. He didn't see himself putting his head in a noose merely to spare Lizzie's sensibilities.

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"Lizzie said she could scarce keep a straight face when the mother bade her follow me. 'T'mother's given me a longer tether than what she thinks for,' she telled me, and she laughed, poor thing, as she said it."

"'Tis true enough."

"She kens nowt but that thou'd kissed me, but she made rare sport o' that. 'Thee and Tony ha'e led off the dance, I've nowt to do but to follow.' What if she did follow? 'Tis that I canna bide the thought on. Let her once ken t' truth—'tis ower wi' any good word I ha'e with her. Why should she listen to such as me? And to what t' mother will say, she'll tak' no heed for very pity."

"If thou'st coom here to talk about Lizzie we might both of us ha'e saved wer steps. What's Lizzie to me? Thou tellt me o' Sunday 'ut thou held it a shame to wed wi' such as I. Dosta think I'm another man by now? Of another mind, mebbby, but o' that thou takst no reckoning. I offered thee once, and thou wouldstna. An' now thou talkst as if thou'd nobbut to stretch out thy hands and take wi'out asking. I'm as fond o' thee as o' any lass—nay, fonder—but thou rid'st wi'

a high hand. Didst ever hear tell on a man 'ut got wed to pleasure his wife's sister?"

"'Twad never pleasure her," flared Jane.

"Wair then?" was his answer.

Clearly an argument of this sort would benefit nobody, and Jane, breathing quickly, took up the tale from a new side.

"Thou wert right when thou said'st I was making the worst of a bad bargain. I did wrong to flyte as I did. I'll do my best to make thee a bettther wife than I've been daughter. Oh Tony," she cried suddenly, letting her shawl fall back on her shoulders, and clinging to him with both hands—"Tony! thou shaltna repent if thou hearken. Thou shaltna indeed, if it lie i' *my* power to bring thee happiness. 'Tis not for my ain I am beggin'."

He would have heard her more readily if it had been, and for this who will blame him?

"Thou talkst o' *my* happiness when 'tis clear enough thou thinkst o' no one but Lizzie. She'll ha'e to tak' t' rough in wi' t' smooth like t' rest o' us; thou'st nae call to be sae tender wi' her."

"But I ask for *mysell*. 'Twere better I were dead than lead her away wi' me, leavin' t' father

an' mother wi' never a lass they can take ower their lips wi'out shame."

Antony raised his head ; there was a distant sound of horse-hoofs in the lane.

"An' for happiness !—them that ha'e done sae wrongly ha'e nae call to look for't."

"Whisht, wilta !—'tis as if I heerd folk i' t' lonin'."

He went a few paces along the barn-wall and stood listening.

"Gie me thy promise, Antony, an' let me be ganging. I wad ill like to be seen here."

"Whisht, wilta !" he whispered impatiently, and he pushed her from him, to stand as before with craned neck in breathless attention. Then there came a sudden cry for help, and the sound of a rearing horse.

"'Twill be t' Black Dog," whispered Jane.

"'Twas not his voice."

"Wair else should be ridin' oop Black Syke lonin' o' this time o' night ?"

The cry was not repeated, yet they could hear plainly that a struggle of some kind was a-foot.

Doubling himself together Antony ran along the wall-side towards Wrathe, and the girl's curiosity made her follow him, though with more caution.

Fighting for breath and sorely afraid, she cowered down in the shadow a few yards from where Antony had stopped. She dared not look as well as listen lest she should be seen and recognised, but by the sounds she judged there must be at least four men. She could hear the rattle of sticks, and every now and then a muttered curse or warning as the horse plunged and reared in the soft mud of the lane.

And once she recognised the Black Dog's voice, though wheezy and gruff. "Pull him down ! pull him down ! Is he to get clear after all ?"

Then she saw Antony raise himself so that he was plain to be seen over the wall-top.

"Let be," he called softly. "Ye can coom to no good this gate."

But they cried to him for help.

"Let be," he repeated. "I'se warrant 'ut t' Scot'll be fain to get off wi' a whole head, and will keep a quiet tongue."

"Ay—wull I, though ?" flung McKay. He had gained a fair position through Antony's interference, and thought to get off with a bruise and a cut or so. The fighting had cleared his brain and warmed his blood ; stranger and alone as he

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was, he was a better fighter than they looked for, and his horse might yet carry him off, money and all, to lodge complaint with the nearest magistrate.

So he planned boldly, and as his assailants held off while crying to Antony, he drove deep his spurs, trying to swing round the mare's head for the backward road to Wrathe. It was well thought of, but he missed his purpose by a hair's-breadth. The Black Dog was flung with force to the ground, yet even as he lay in the dirt under the trampling hoofs of the horse he raised his head and called hoarsely, "See to ut, Tony, that 'a tell no tales, for, by God ! thou shalt swing wi' t' rest o' us if 'a get clear this night."

Antony had sprung over the wall, and now ran nearer. And Jane, grown careless in her terror, was clutching to the wet stones of the wall-top. Seen or not, she must see. The suddenness of the catastrophe left her passive for interference. That she should have called in help never occurred to her. Even the thought that a man was to be done to death before her eyes weighed not with her. The fierce beating of her heart, the strained eyes that watched, the ears that would miss nothing, all sight and feeling ran to her one desire : she

would have Antony within her power to work her will with him. Love for the man was dead, turned rather to dull hate; love for her child was not, she could not else have clutched at safety through its father's crime.

This much she saw in the grey glimmer of the clouded moonlight. The horse pulled back against the wall. McKay would have been heading towards Wrath in the turn of a second, but Antony had snatched hold of the bridle. The gleam of a long knife in the Scotchman's hand, and next, before she could rightly see how, the Scot had been dragged from his horse and both men were on the ground. There was the jar and scrape of steel against stone; the Black Dog was on his feet again, and another of the gang had caught the frightened mare. And then the struggle ended in a terrible silence; Antony raised himself slowly, and the rest stood back, leaving a huddled mass in the gutter under the wall.

Jane's stiffened hands let go their hold on the wall, she fell back behind it, and knelt in the wet grass, her whole body shaken with gasping sobs.

Until then Heseltine had remained ignorant of this added witness. He had bent over the body

and was fumbling in the warmth of an inner pocket, but this unexpected sound daunted him. He sprang back from the dead man, looking fearfully into the night. A moment later he was cursing Antony in crisp undertones, to hide his lapse of courage.—
 “’Tis some wench o’ thine, I’ll be bound. Thou’lt not be content till t’ whole countryside be bidden to the hangin’.”

“Wair is’t?” asked Matt of Antony.

“Jane fra Crossriggs. Nay; ye needna be feared,” he went on; “she’s in wi’ t’ rest of us, gang as it may. She hangs too much by her own good name to open her mouth against us.”

“Not Jane!” said one of the younger Thirkells.

“Ay! Jane,” repeated Antony moodily. “Her mind’s too set on t’ kirk door to care what she steps ower. She’ll hold her tongue and be fain.”

“She shall swear,” said his father. “We’s not risk wer necks on a wench’s word.” Then, trembling and scarcely conscious, Jane must lay her hand on the dead man’s bosom, whispering word for word at the Black Dog’s bidding.

And Antony, oath for oath, with his hand on the man he had murdered, swore to marry her as the price of her guilty silence.

CHAPTER V

ANTONY'S RIDE

BETSY was yawning impatiently by the fireside in the Barerakes kitchen, while every now and then she gave a resentful look at the clock.

"If 'a don't come soon," she said aloud, "I'se wait no longer."

Then she opened the door, and listened if there were any incoming footfall, and she heard the paddock gate clash.

"It'll be him," she said, closing the door and going back to the fire ; "and 'tis time too."

"So here thou art," she yawned, as Antony came into the kitchen. "I'se about tired o' sittin' here by masell. What's kept thee sae long ?"

Antony stood at the sink with his back to her ; he was rinsing his hands in the wash-bowl.

"Hasta some sort of a clout thou canst lay thy

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hands on ? I've cutten masell wi' a scythe i' t' hay mow."

"Ut must ha'e hung i' a daft place—my word ! what a cut. It'll learr¹ thee be more careful, I'll warrant. What a mess thou'rt in !—ut's bled deep for a flesh cut."

"'Tis down to t' bone," said Antony.

"Ay ! but t' bones' soon come to ower t' shackle."¹

Antony drew his hand beyond reach of her inspection with an exclamation of pain.

"Get a bit o' summut, an' tie it oop—ut aches an' throbs I can scarce bear wi't, noo I've coom into the warm. Lookin' an' talkin' 'll no heal ut."

Betsy routed in the bottom of an untidy drawer.

"'Tis allus t' way wi' men folk," she moralised. "If they but scratch their little finger, an' catch sight o' their ain blood, ut sets 'em a-datherin. Thou looks for all t'world as if——"

"What matter how I look ?" roared Tony ; "if *thou'd* look a bit sharper 'twould be more to t' point ; I've to ride ower Blairthorp Moss before t' moon set."

Betsy was tearing off a long rag of linen, but she stopped in surprise.

¹ Wrist.

"What new game ista oop to now? Hasta made oop thy mind to tak' t' King's shillin'?"

Tony held out his arm impatiently.

"'Tis ma father's 'game,' as thou callst ut; thou might ken 'twas none o' my choosing. Tie ut oop, damn thee!" he called suddenly, for Betsy had bent over his wrist, pulling it nearer the candle. "Tie ut oop. How long dosta want me to stand here to stiffen? I can't put ma hand down till ut's tied, and ut aches like the devil."

"I was only thinking ut was a gey rough cut for a scythe," she said sullenly.

There was a clatter of hoofs on the cobbles outside and the neighing of a horse.

"Thou'st left t' garth gate open," she went on, as she twisted the linen round and round the wound. "And Jerry'll be breakin' fence an' away."

"Draw ut tighter—ay! tighter."

"Nay, there'll be another horse on the road—didsta hear that whinny? Ay! an' noo Jerry's answerin'."

Antony lifted his head uneasily; he was wondering that Betsy should have taken a stranger for old Jerry. He would have recognised Jerry's neigh in a horse fair.

"'Twill do for a bit," he said, taking his hand away with its clumsy bandage. "An' Betsy lass, never fash to wait here for t' owd man if thou want'st to be off. He'll happen be late, an' I shallna be back afore dawning."

He mistrusted a witness to the Black Dog's return.

"Ay," said the girl readily. "An' Tony lad, can'ta give me some o' t' brass 'ut's owin' me? Kisses an' promisin's all very well, but brass be bettther nor either."

Antony glowered uneasily.

"'Tis what I ha'e least of," he said sourly.

"Ay, but thou kens where he keeps ut," she said whisperingly; and she touched his arm. "Get me but five shillin' an' I'll bide content for a bit. Or if thou daren't, tell me where it lies an' I'll manage masell; 'tis but takin' what's due to me."

"Nay, nay. I'se nae syke a fool as to let thy fingers touch owt they've an itch for. Gi'e's a light, an' I'll see if there be owt at all i' t' house; 'tis more than likely 'a has ut with him, or has found out a new hoarding-place. And mebbly he has nowt after all."

"Nay, there'll be summut," said the girl confi-

dently. "There'll be McKay wantin' his dues to morn."

Tony snatched the candle from her hand and turned to go upstairs.

"An' he'll find the Scot harder to put off than a poor servant wench," snorted Betsy, following him to the stair foot and listening to the creak of the joists as he moved about overhead, if perchance she might gather some clue to that as yet undiscovered hiding-place.

And when he tarried upstairs she grew impatient and crept up, a step at a time, to spy on him. She put her eye to the crack of the half-closed door and saw that he had changed his coat. She watched breathlessly as he knelt by an old hair trunk near the window and rummaged among its contents, but when he drew out a shepherd's plaid and closed the box, stretching out for the candle, she fled down the stairs again and took her old seat by the fireside.

"Here's five shillin'," he said, throwing the coin into her lap, "an' I doubt he'll be free wi' his tongue, if nowt else, when 'a misses it. An' Betsy lass, dinna be blabbin' to onybody that I'm stirrin' to-night. There's busybodies enough i' Thordale, an' though 'tis not my own business

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I'm after, I'd as lief 'twere as little talked of as may be."

"Ay," nodded Betsy carelessly. "I'll not be talking. An' to say truth if ut's owt that t' Black Dog has a finger in, honest folk'll do well to give ut t' go-by."

"Sin' when hasta turned honest?" sneered Antony. "Nay, lass," he went on as he saw her frown, "thou'rt honest enough for me. We'se two black sheep together, thee an' me; but we'd scrow along middlin' honest an ut were not for t' Black Dog at wer tails."

Then he gave her a sounding kiss as the surest pacifier, and, snatching at his cap and whip, went out into the night. Loosing the mare's bridle from the gatepost he led her up the lane on the turf sides so long as Barerakes was within ear-shot. Then he leapt into the saddle and rode her hard, like a man who has little time before him, and a clear road where he need fear no observation.

When the track joined the turnpike and turned northwards over the fells he had to dismount, for the road was loose and steep. In the stillness of the night the ring of the mare's shoes upon the

stones made an ominous clatter ; it seemed to Tony at times that he must be followed, since it was not given to one horse thus to wake the echoes. And once on the moor top, where the track ran open across the heather and the roadway was covered with soft, close turf, the sound of a steady gallop behind him brought the sweat out on his forehead. Digging in his spurs he fumbled under the folds of his plaid for the dead man's pistol, while he leant forward in the saddle and cursed the moon that was stealing out at the top of a ragged cloud. Yet spur as he might the thud of hoofs came always nearer, he must look back at the risk of being overtaken and recognised ; if necessary he must shoot, though the sound of a pistol-shot was an added danger among these silent hills. Crushing his cap over his brow he turned in his saddle and took aim in the moonlight ; it was only one of the fell-horses that had followed the mare, and now whinnied for company.

So once again he could take breath and courage. It was mere folly to think of there being any one out on the fells at this time of night ; would any one ride for pleasure past Blairthorp gibbet ?

And men's business ended with sun-down and darkness, save such business as his, which shunned daylight.

It was high upon Blairthrop Moss that the gibbet stood, at the point where the road divides east and north, and Tony looked up at it with a dry mouth as he turned the mare eastwards. It irked him that he must ride under the shadow of it, this night of all nights, while the wind rattled the chains with the menace of prophecy.

Northwards the road pitched, winding and dangerous, into Blairthrop bottoms, still called Bloody Vale in memory of many a Border feud when Scot had met dalesman in deadly but open fight. But Tony had chosen the eastern road which hugged the hillside and ran nearly level for more than a mile before it cut down to Blairford. And his thoughts were so set on reaching the moor gate that bounded the fell on this northern side, that he recked little as yet for the lonely tramp back, so glad would he be to be quit of the mare for good.

He leapt down at the gate with a sigh of relief, leading the mare through, and then closing the latch between them. He could see the white

lather on her flanks and the froth on the bit ; she stood with her head drooping, jaded and travel-stained, waiting with tired, unreasoning patience to be remounted. He called to her softly over the gate, giving her a touch with the whip, and turned his face homewards, rid of a burden.

But the way was strange to her and the night eerie without companionship ; she thrust her head over the bars and whinnied piteously. The young man hesitated ; he might have been hard to men and women, but never till now had an animal appealed to him in vain. He walked back to the gate, trying to wave the mare off, but she put her wet nose on his shoulder ; he opened the gate to turn her head eastwards, but she was for coming through. He jerked her head round roughly, urging her forward, only to find her turn at the click of the gate spring, nosing his hand in a prayer that would not be gainsaid.

Then he lifted his arm, cursing her, himself, and his father, and lashed out at her furiously, so that she fled from him down the hill, a stumbling, crashing figure of terror, with her bridle hanging.

He had ruined a woman light-heartedly, he

had killed a man fearing only detection; but now for the first time he felt a murderer at heart, with remorse that well nigh unmanned him.

With lagging steps and bent head he retraced his way over Blairthorp Moss. The moon rode clear of clouds, and the moors stretched around him in ghastly silence. If he lifted his eyes the gaunt outline of the gibbet loomed black against the sky; he scarce dared to look at it lest he should lack the courage to go past. But when he neared it he raised his head jauntily, as one might look a foe in the face, and his very blood froze at the sight of the huddled figure of a man lying at its foot. The terror of being followed, his subsequent shame and remorse were as nothing to the numbing horror that took possession of him at that silent shadow. He stood limply, with trembling knees, scarce certain whether what he saw were flesh or spirit. The head was huddled forward on the breast; had it been anywhere else he would have said it was a tramp asleep; but here in this ill-omened spot, who could be sure whether it were man or devil?

He crept past on the soft turf, holding his breath, and when he must pass the thing closest

he heard the sound of uneasy breathing, then he knew it for a tramp and took courage. But when the brow of the hill hid the gibbet from sight he pulled himself together and ran for close on a mile, feeling freer and safer for every yard gained.

Had the man been there when he rode past on the way out? or had he come up from Bloody Vale and sunk there where the roads meet, unable to get further, and too far gone to care whether he slept under a gibbet or no?

The clouds he had prayed for on his outward journey gathered heavily from the west, and as the moon set the wind rose, bringing with it a sense of moisture that turned to rain before he reached the descent of the pass into Thordale. Used as his eyes were to darkness, of which they got more than enough in a long northern winter, he could scarce feel his way in this inky blackness, and the great drops of rain that beat in his face seemed as cold and as stinging as hail. Long before he reached the Barerakes track he was wet to the skin, though his thoughts left him little leisure to notice it.

He was thinking that his, after all, had been a

better lot than that of the man who, in Black Syke Barn, held watch by the murdered Scotchman.

He tramped on in the darkness; the swish of the rain and the splash, splash of his boots in the soaked turf beating time to a whirl of thoughts—thoughts that flitted and started in many directions, but which had ever the death struggle for centre: the talk of folk on to-morrow's market, his own life with Jane in the years to come, and the black shadow of the gibbet that threatened to blot out all.

CHAPTER VI

THE COURTSHIP OF BETSY MIDDLEMAS

NOW as soon as Tony had turned his back upon Barerakes, Betsy had spread the ashes over the fire, and, taking her shawl down from the peg on the door, had put out the candle, and left the house to darkness. To see Jerry at the paddock-gate, when she had taken it for granted he was carrying Tony into Blairthorp, gave her a momentary feeling of surprise, but her thoughts soon turned into other, more personal channels.

She clattered sturdily down the lane in her clogs, her shawl wrapped loosely over her head, and the hard-earned crown-piece clutched carefully in her hand.

"I'm later than I said," she thought, "but if 'a won't wait that long 'tis no such odds. 'Tis more nor I expected to get a crown for t' askin'. Mebby

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Tony's a bit softer nor what I thought. If I were sure o' Tony, *he'd* be t' lad for my mooney ; but Jonah'll do for a backwatch."

Betsy was not one to hurry herself, and trudging along the road she had time to weigh one man against another in her thoughts.

"Tony's bonnie, an' has a way wi' him, but a's t' Black Dog to his father when all's said an' done. An' 'tis time I be wed, if wed I'm to be ; an' I doubt Tony'll ha'e less reason for hurryin'. Jonah's a settled man, if 'a be a dozzened^{*} owd fool ; an' 't would be easier humourin' him than Tony."

A mean, shambling figure came out from the shadow of the wall and stood before her.

"Is't thee ?" she asked, stopping to consider it.

"Ay."

"An' who be I ?" she pursued, to make identity the surer.

"Betsy Middlemas."

"Well, thoo's right in thy guessin' an' wrong i' thy meetin'-place ; whar was't I telled thee to wait o' me ?"

"Nigh t' brig."

* Untidy.

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"An' be this nigh t' brig?"

"Thou wert behind time," he murmured extenuatingly.

"Mebby," she answered severely, "an' mebbly I've summut o' more matter on hand than to be gabbin' oonder t' wet trees wi' a man owd enough to be ma faither."

The man turned his steps submissively in her wake.

"Oh, coom now, Betsy! thoo's none sae young as all that," he expostulated feebly. "Why, thoo minded wer first bairn when t' missus was churched—can'ta think on?"

"Dosta think I coomed here o' this time o' night to talk o' bairns and churchin's?" she snapped, avoiding the point at issue. "Tha'lt be tellin' next hoo thou buried thy first, an' what t' ham cost at t' funeral."

"Wall," he retorted slowly, "I maun bury my first afore I go courtin' my second." And he gave a wheezy chuckle. "Eh, Betsy lass? I maun bury my first if I'm to get thee for my second."

It was too good a jest to lay by, and he would have turned his tongue yet a third time round the flavour of it had not Betsy cut in ruthlessly.

‘Buriel ! Is’t buriel, he’s saying ? She’s been buriel ower lang to be dragged oop o’ this fashion. Wair but a daft owd body’ld be talkin’ aboot his ‘first’ an’ his ‘second’ like a riddlemaree, ’stead of——”

“Ay ! ’stead o’ what ?” asked the man, shambling a step nearer.

“Ye’d think,” pursued the relentless fair, “that a body ’ut had gone through t’ whole business before, fra t’ asking to t’ buryin’, ’ld be a bit handier nor this wi’ his luv-makin’ ! Bless me ! I beant a man mysell, but I’ll lay I’ve a bettther notion than thee how to get t’ right side o’ a lass.”

“Ye’ll ha’e heerd mair variety,” he said slavishly. “’Tis allus hardest on t’ man ’ut cooms last.”

“Cooms last !” screamed Betsy ; “thou girt goavissen ! Dosta think I maun die a maid if I dinna mak’ shift with thee ? ‘Cooms last,’ saith ’a ! when ’twas nobbut five minute agoe I left Tony swearin’ by all he could think on——”

“Ay, ’a can do that.”

“Swearin’, an’ hangin’ round my neck, an’ wantin’ me to promise all sorts.”

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"An' what didsta?" asked Jonah, with interest, for the story seemed widely suggestive.

"I jus' gave him a clout ower t' ear an' I coomed away." Betsy drew herself up, a massive figure of virtue triumphant, while Jonah stood still in the roadway and scratched his head.

"What art thou laggin' for noo?" called Betsy over her shoulder.

"I was thinkin' that 'a coomed off no betther nor me i' t' end," he answered deliberately. "Ise keep to my ain gate, for 'tis ill learnin' owd dogs new tricks."

"Arta meanin' to tell me thoo courted thy 'first' o' this fashion?" asked Betsy scornfully. "It's true thou'd more time to waste i' them days, but 'tis but the more reason for hurry—one foot i' t' grave as thou hast."

"Debby warn't so quick wi' her tongue," answered Jonah, with as much tartness as was left in him. "An' ut took the less time, sin' I cud get a word in edgewise now an' again. If thou talked less thysell, happen thou'dst hear mair; an' 'tis no use two clappers clashin' at one an' t' same time."

"I'se listenin'."

Jonah grunted testily.

"An' I hear nowt."

"'Tis blowin' oop for rain—I felt a drap o' my nose."

"Best tie thy kerchief ower thy ears an' run away hame—I'll away back to Tony."

It was a sorely tried spirit that sought for relief in words.

"Drat the bitch !"

"Coom," said Betsy suddenly, as the threatened shower broke down upon them in earnest—"coom, we'll mebbly be wet through afore thou can find owt to say ; we'se be betther alongside o' yon wall, 'twill keep t' worst o't off us an' thou'lt ha'e time to think ower soom mair likely luv names than yon."

Bending their heads against the hissing down-pour, they hurried through a gap in the wall and crouched down in the gutter.

"'Twad be dhryer by Heseltyne's laithe,"¹ said Jonah, pointing a few yards to the right ; "the rain beats that way." And for the second time that night a man and woman stood under the eaves for shelter.

¹ Barn.

COURTSHIP OF BETSY MIDDLEMAS 83

Now while Jonah was collecting himself for further effort Betsy stood idly fingering the rough wall, and when at last the slow wits had thought out some matter that the tongue began to impart, a warm, wet hand was thrust over his mouth.

"Whisht, wilita!" she whispered, drawing his ear nearer her lips; "there's summut afoot here 'ut I canna unravel. There's a light i' t' laithe an' men folk talkin'; let's hear what's astir."

And Jonah, nothing loath to put off his not too prosperous wooing, leant limply against the wall while she stealthily pulled away the wisps of dried grass that filled up the air-slits in the barn. By so doing she had an inconspicuous peep-hole, to which she first set an eye and then an ear; and an overwhelming curiosity soon made her forget her companion.

So long as the rain fell he sheltered in peaceful content, but when the moon climbed out of a cloud he touched Betsy's shoulder and was for moving homewards. She turned quickly; the look on her face startled him.

Leaving her spy-hole for a second she pulled his head nearer her own.

"If thou wants to die quietly i' thy bed thoo

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maun mak' no sound," she whispered ; and her white face and frightened eyes brought conviction.

Then she set her ear to her niche once more, and the man, by nature a coward, stood motionless at her side, scarce daring to breathe, while his eyes hung on hers and his slow wits tried to piece out the truth as the moonlight showed its reflection in the woman's face.

It was the sound of Tony Heseltine's name that had first jogged her curiosity—curiosity that had given way to anger, as anger to fear, and fear to an overpowering greed. To the man who stood watching her face the minutes lagged, but Betsy had lost all sense of time.

Suddenly she turned to Jonah and snatching at the collar of his coat dragged him down on his knees, crouching herself by his side in the shadow of the lane wall. He did not need to be warned into silence ; he himself could hear the click of the barn-door latch as two men turned out into the lane. He could even catch the low-toned conversation.

"'Tis cloudin' oop fra t' west—in an hour 'twill be dark enough. I'll away home for a spade, an' do thou gi'e t' Black Dog a call, we maun lose no time."

COURTSHIP OF BETSY MIDDLEMAS 85

"Would thou leave t' corp unwatched?" said the other doubtfully.

"'Tis but a step up to Barerakes, and wair should be stirring this time o' night? We maun risk summut either way."

He could hear the men separate, one hurrying back to Wrathe, the other passing within a yard of their hiding-place, though on the opposite side of the wall. Jonah huddled yet nearer to the wet grass, lest he should hear the footsteps cease and know he had been discovered. But when they grew fainter and fainter, scarcely to be distinguished from the distant rush of the mill-race, Betsy touched his arm and raised herself cautiously.

"He will be back i' no time; we maun bide here no longer than need be."

"Ay, ay," he said, trembling, as his thoughts swung back to what had been left in the barn.

Betsy sprang across to the lane gate, opening it silently, and Jonah was careful to be but a step behind her. Picking her way in the cow-trodden slough by the barn door, she put up her hand to the latch. "We maun see an' make sure," she whispered.

"I'll not meddle in't," he gave back, his teeth chattering. "Coom away, coom away, lass, 'tis no canny!"

"Then bide where thou art, for a white-livered craven, and gi'e ear 'ut nobody coom."

She stole in, the wide-open door revealing a mysterious darkness, into which the man stared unseeing for a measureless length of time.

In reality, however, Betsy made no long examination. A few seconds to accustom her eyes to the darkness, a few more spent in groping about in the dimness, and she hurried out again into the moonlight with a face so grey that Jonah took her for a ghost and fled gasping. But she was not going to let herself be out-distanced. The company, even of such a turn-tail, was desirable. Catching him by the arm she tried to shake into him some of her own returning courage.

"Didsta take me for a boggart? Shalt feel whether I be flesh an' blood or no."

Jonah gave no answer; he kept what breath he had for other needs.

"We'd best leave t' loning before Wrathe, or mebbey we'll fall in wi' Matt before we wanted."

"We'se not want to do that," quavered Jonah.

COURTSHIP OF BETSY MIDDLEMAS 87

"No before we're ready," said Betsy coolly. "Will there be onybody at yours?" she pursued.

"Naebody, naebody. But thoo'd best get to thy ain home—'twad be more seemly."

"I can get in there ony time o' t' day or night, an' nobody any the wiser; but we've our crack to get over. Didsta hear owt o what they were sayin'?"

"Nowt but that they left t' corp unwatched," blethered Jonah, like a frightened sheep. "An' I want no more—I'll not make nor meddle in't."

"Dosta want to wed a lass wi' a dowry?"

"Wair then?"

"Masell."

"Thoo!" answered Jonah, not without a certain contempt. "Thou's nobbut t' duds thou stands — oop in."

"Nay," said Betsy, with a ring of triumph in her voice. "I've but to say t' word to t' Black Dog, an' he'll gi'e me a bonny nest-egg to save his own neck."

"He canna gi'e thee what he hasna himsell."

Betsy's voice sank to a whisper, though they had reached Jonah's cottage and she had no fear of being overheard. "Wair is't hangs oop i' yon laithe?"

Jonah's key dropped from his trembling fingers, and he had to grope on the moss-grown cobbles as he answered, "Hoo should I ken?"

"'Tis t' Scots laird."

"McKay?"

"Ay, McKay. Nay, dinna fash to light oop," she went on, as she heard Jonah fingering after the tinder-box. "What I've to say can as well be said i' t' dark, an' I must be slippin' ower to ours."

Jonah would have been glad of the sense of protection gained by a rushlight, but the mention of McKay had roused him a little.

"I was to have paid him to-morn," he murmured.

"He'll no be a hard bargainer," said the woman, with a tremulous laugh. Then she went on, with little uncertain changes in her voice, "They've hanged him oop to a bridle hook an' setten a wooden bowl under his feet. An' this night, when t' moon's clouded, they'll hug him oop on to t' moor, and bury him i' the Moss. 'Tis a big man to carry so long a gate."

"An' wair killed him?"

"'Twas Tony cam' oop at finish, or he'd ha'e gotten clear, they said."

COURTSHIP OF BETSY MIDDLEMAS 89

"Tony? Aho! Tony," said Jonah, with less of his usual caution. "An' hoo is't 'ut thou aren't for making Tony wed thee, blood-money an' all?"

The question rubbed into a sore, but Betsy quickly reckoned truth to be, after all, the safest answer.

"An' so I would, if I could ha'e been first i' t' field; but ut seems Janey Harker were before me, an' has gotten t' Black Dog's blessin'. Things bein' as they are," she went on, "an' not as they should be, I look to bringing an owd man a dowry. But wed I will be, and that before t' year's out, so thou hast my last word on't."

CHAPTER VII

LONG TOM O' SCAR END

"THOU said I might gang if ut were a fine day, an' a fine day ut is," said Lizzie, as she swung a wet cloth over the ceiling rack.

"Ay! ut's a fine day," assented her mother carelessly, "but there'll be many another fine day i' a lifetime."

"Perhaps none sae mony this Back End," pouted Lizzie.

"An' thy father's not takin' t' cart."

"Ay, but I can ride behind."

"An' 'tis kirning,¹ an' Janey looks good for nowt."

Lizzie glanced at her sister. It seemed to her that she looked rather dark-eyed and white in the bright autumn sunshine, and for the moment she forgot how greatly she wished for the outing.

¹ Churning.

"Art thou ill?—wouldsta rather I bided at home?" she asked, laying her cheek against Janey's shoulder in a queer little caress that belonged to her characteristically among a race that dealt little in caresses.

"Nay," answered Janey quickly, "there's nowt amiss wi' me. Indeed, I'd rather be rid o' thee than not." And she smiled down at the eager face.

"An' Janey'll be ower i' Blairthrop next market," pursued Lizzie. "If I dinna gang noo, maybe I'll not get this side o' New Year."

"Oh, well, thou canst gang; 'tis a good bit since thou hadst an outing," said Mrs. Harker, relenting. It was a matter of principle with her to refuse at the first asking; it proved one a woman of sense and a maintainer of discipline.

Now Lizzie had a variety of reasons for wishing to go over to Thordale on this day above all others, some of which she stated openly and some of which she kept as her private concern. It was so seldom either of the lasses went over on market-day (or indeed on any other), that a custom had grown up in their family on which Lizzie was very careful to insist. On market-days all the spare eggs were put in a basket, and being carried to Thordale came back in the shape of groceries, worsted, or

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whatever the need might be. But if Janey or Lizzie took them, it was understood they might barter in their own interest.

That this week happened to be rich in eggs was one of Lizzie's unspoken reasons for the choice of day. And she had had the prudence to hide that morning's findings behind the wash-house door, lest her mother should be for halving so rich a harvest. Moreover, in a little linen bag she had enough money for a purchase of no less importance than a winter's cloak. This was to be done under the guiding eye of an aunt who had married a flesher in Thordale, and who would exercise a wholesome restraint upon Lizzie's more ardent imagination.

"An' there's McKay—I've heerd so much about McKay these days, I'm fain to see him i' t' flesh. Folk say he be taller nor Long Tom o' Scar End, an' a head o' rough hair like t' lyle red beasts ut he brings South. Is he married thinksta? I'd like to show him we've bonnier lasses hereaway than oop in his own country." This to her brother Simon.

"An' hoo'lt thou show him that?" laughed Sim. "Arta thinkin' o' takin' some weel-favoured

lass along witha? Best be careful how thoo go'st nigh him; he'll be pickin' thee oop, and puttin' thee into his poke, an' showin' thee north of Perth for a hop-o'-my-thumb. That's if 'a sees thee at all!"

Lizzie straightened herself by the wash-house door, standing on tiptoe with its kindly support.

"I'm well enough grown for a woman," she replied, with her nose turned heavenwards. "I'm even taller than some; but if I were not, 'tis 'little an' good' as the speech runs."

"A 'woman' thou call'st thyself? when thou'st scarce learnt to talk plain!" teased Simon. "I was thinkin' only this mornin' that 'twas time I got thee a new rattle; 'twad maybe keep thy tongue stiller."

"Long Tom——" she began.

"Oh, Long Tom'll say owt to a lass. Never heed what *he* says. Told thee thou wert as tall as Samson? an' talked wise enough for thy grannie? And now I think on, we hear a powerful lot o' what Long Tom says, more as if he were t' prophet Elijah! Cansta tell me too what brings him hangin' round here of an evenin'? Will ut be Janey, thinksta?"

Lizzie shot a nervous glance at the open door of the kitchen.

"Dinna let t' mother hear thee," she begged, with heightened colour. "She'd happen think there was summut i' thy nonsense. Hoo should I ken what brings him?" she went on, with a bolder face, though with downcast eyes. "I thought he was *thy* friend."

"Ay! ut'll be that thou mayst depend; 'a cooms roun' three times a week to have a crack wi' me, an' when 'a gets this far 'a clean forgets what 'a set out to say. 'Tis a long step fra' Scar End, there's no wonder i' that; I oft forget t' text between kirk an' home, so that I ha'e no answer ready when t' mother cooms askin' what we had."

"Ay," burst in Lizzie, glad enough to carry the war into the enemy's country, "but that is because thoo wast never at kirk at all. Hoo was I to ken thou'd told mother 'Jesus wept'? When she asked *me* t' text I tellt her t' chapter an' verse, an' all as proper as could be, but it did not agree and she didn't ken which to believe."

Simon laughed, unabashed.

"T' next time I'll be tellin' her hoo it is."

"Ay do! I can match thy tale wi' a better."

Dosta think she'll tak' great heed whether I be at kirk or no when she hears what makes thee so set o' evenin' service?"

"Oh, well," said Lizzie nervously, "'twas nobbut my fun ; thou knowst right well I'd never breathe half a word."

Then looking over her shoulder cautiously, she came up to where he was standing.

"Sim," she whispered, "arta goin' to t' market?"

"What's to do now?"

"Thou'lt let me ride back wi' thee, same as thoo did fra t' fair?"

"I was jealous what it'ld be!"

"Wilta?"

"I may be kept."

"'Tis no matter."

"I must be home betimes."

"Nay Sim—there's none such hurry! I wish I were a man," she continued; "a lad can dangle at fairs an' at markets, 'a can coom home after dark, an' say ut was business kept him. Business! an' wair'ld believe *me* if I hatched oop syke an unlikely tale? If I were a lad I cud do what I would wi'out such a set; t' lasses are hard done by."

But she went into the house satisfied that she had arranged matters to her whim and convenience. And indeed she would have been the last woman on earth to forego the privileges and advantages of coaxing, with a brother so easily humoured as Simon and with Long Tom her very humble servant.

At Thordale Market it was matter for all men's remark that McKay the Scot should be wanting. It was unlike the man, as they said, and little like a Scotsman, to turn lie-a-bed when folk waited to pay their debts. And some were wroth, and some not unwilling to handle their money so much the longer.

Now the Black Dog was among the former. He listened dark-eyed and impatient while other men aired their views.

"Nobbut last night at t' 'Black Heifer' 'a told me 'a looked to seein' me betimes. An' here I be wi' t' brass, and he sleepin' ut off i' Wrathe."

"He was in Wrathe yestreen?" asked Geordie Wilson, and a new kindled hope died down in his heart. If the Scot were in Wrathe, pay-day, though it might be put off for the moment, could scarcely be far distant.

"Ay," answered the other, "I met him by chance at Peggie's."

"Ay," put in a fresh voice, "'a was there sure enough, an' drinkin' enough to make him see double. 'A got t' right side o' Peggie. I canna call to mind when I've heerd her sae soft-tongued."

"Didn't 'a go out wi' thee?" asked one of the Black Dog, who was seen to scowl at this effort of memory.

"Ay! just oot into t' yard. 'A said first he'd ride a bit o' t' road wi' me, but when I began on t' price o' hogs, 'a said he'd left summut i' t' house, and ganged back to fetch ut."

The circle showed their perception of the humour of this inference, but Heseltyne snarled more angrily.

"I want to pay, an' ha'e dune wi't," he went on. "Not to lose time an' money both."

"What hasta at home," sneered Long Tom, "'ut's sae pressin' ? Thoo's likest a mare 'ut's left her foal i' the stall. T' Scot'll coom before nightfall."

"An' me danglin' here ?"

"Nay, if I know thee thou'lt find theesell a canny shelter fra t' wind, an' t' Scot, he's man enough to seek thee i' t' alehouse."

"Happen he's not money enough for t' ale an' t' Scot both," suggested another, whereat Heseltyne first blustered, and then admitted that times were bad. But finally he sought that suggested shelter, and the market square saw little more of him until he rode out of it, somewhat unsteadily, at nightfall.

Lizzie Harker had not taken the Scot's absence very seriously to heart since she had keener interests on hand than mere curiosity. She had ridden into Thordale behind her father; up and down hill along the six miles of the road, it is doubtful whether her tongue was still many seconds. Harker's replies were barely audible, and but few and far between. He was quite content to laugh and listen to the child, so that the day was somewhat of a festival to both.

The clear autumn sunshine glowed over dale and hill, and called out an almost summer-like green on the mountain pastures. Here and there a tree more sheltered than its fellows had kept its autumn covering of gold; here and there a bush of scarlet hips shone jewel-like against a grey stone wall. Yet the sun that shone the length and breadth of Thordale saw nothing more bright and cheerful than these two. Nor, if you had met them, could you have passed by unsmiling.

These two touched happiness at different ends, the grey-haired, smiling father and the merry, red-cheeked lass. And amid all the darker pictures of those long-past years I would fain recall the sunlight with the shadow; I would wish as clear a vision of these two as I have tried to give to sadder memories.

Many passed them on the road, for the white horse jogged cautiously under its double burden. And whoever passed slacked rein a bit and loitered, and was all the better for the chance encounter. And when they pressed forward into Thordale they might remark that Harker was "clean daft ower his lasses," or that Lizzie was a "saucy chit, for sure." Yet no less did they smile over the recollection, and carried it back to the home-staying folk as matter for comment, even among the weightier news of the Scotchman's absence or the ruling price of beasts.

Even Lizzie, with the prospects of the day before her—a day of such responsibilities and chances—even Lizzie was almost sorry to see the first grey houses of the little market town, though her regrets were not for long when she found herself on her feet with the egg basket safely on one arm. While

her father rode up town to his sister's, where they put up the horse, Lizzie sauntered past the stalls with wondering eyes, now looking at the wares on sale, now demurely glancing at the bystanders with so careless a mien you could swear she sought nothing. Halfway across the square, however, she suddenly stopped, and began fingering some butter stampers with most earnest deliberation. She was indeed so engrossed in her pursuit that she did not hear Long Tom's first greeting, and only looked up when he touched her arm.

"So thou'rt coom?" he said joyously; "I'd most gi'en thee oop."

Lizzie looked as surprised to see him as if farmers were rare birds on market-days; it seemed she had taken it for granted he would be busy at home. Still she was glad to see him, unexpected though it was; she came so seldom to Thordale that she liked to see as many acquaintances as possible.

"'Tis like enough I'll not get again afore Candlemas."

"Best mak' t' most o' thy chances," counselled Tom.

"'Tis what I intend," she said, smiling. Then she turned and greeted some one else with a

warmth that was almost affectionate. "Why, Bob!" she exclaimed, "ista goin' by wi' never a handshake? When was't we met last, I wonder?—not sin' Moortown Fair I'm thinkin'? An' hoo are they all at yours?" she went on, for the swain seemed rather fluttered by her notice, and had not his answer ready; "hoo are they all at yours?—'tis a gey while sin' I heard owt. Ye've not called in at Crossriggs for sae long."

"Bob's busy courtin'," put in Tom, with his open smile; "thou'st no time these days to be clashin' oop to Crossriggs, hasta, lad?" and he clapped him on the back with an appearance of hearty goodwill. Now it was certain that though Bob was courting, he had not as yet confined his attentions to one lass, therefore he gulped down Tom's congratulations in red-faced confusion.

"Why, this is news, to be sure," said the girl airily. "It's the only way one hears owt o' what's astir—by comin' into Thordale Market. I'se sure at Crossriggs we hear nowt at all, 'tis that quiet. If folk do step in of an evening it's nobbut middle-aged ones 'ut bring such dowlie news we're betther wi'out them."

Tom smiled again, but with more of an effort;

for though thirty-six seemed young enough to him, he was conscious that it might look "middle-aged" to thoughtless seventeen.

It had been Tom's claim to notability that as a younger man he had troubled himself little about womenfolk. His younger brothers were all wed by this time, with homes of their own, and he had marked the ups and downs of their several wooings with humorous but not greatly interested eyes. One by one they had left the old home until he and his mother were its only inmates.

His brother's wives were agreed in their doubts concerning him, wherever might lie other causes for disagreement. In the first place Tom was cross-eyed, and it embarrassed them oddly to feel themselves the victims of his scrutiny, without even being certain which eye was turned upon them. Through his talk ran a similar ambiguity; no comforting assurance that this was spoken in jest and that in earnest. His mouth might have convinced them of weighty gravity, but one or other of the brown eyes twinkled in contradiction.

Among men he had his share of popularity, as one who could play the fool effectively, though he himself was little of a fool. He had the name of

a good farmer, was well-to-do, though "near." Older men came to him for advice, and he was held a shrewd judge of stock.

But conscious as he was of all these talents, they seemed to him little of the sort that could touch the fancy of a lass like Lizzie; and though he wore an appearance of self-assurance that piqued the girl he was rather down-hearted at her jibes of "middle-age."

Now this same self-assurance, which did him good service as a buyer and seller of stock, was nowise an advantage in his courtship, but it was the outer shell of the man and not easily to be laid aside. Could Lizzie have seen behind it, things had gone smoother for both. Tease as she was, she was too warm-hearted to have knowingly hurt a fly. But she did not see, and was uncertain how far Long Tom was in earnest. Therefore, with laudable curiosity, she continued her researches; and a pin acts as well as a knife in some operations.

It was some minutes before the unwilling Bob could escape from her affectionate interest. When he moved a step she would whip out some fresh question as to his concerns, and listen with breathless attention to his halting answers.

"She 'most held on to my coat-lappets, she was that fain to keep me," was Bob's boast in the alehouse—a boast that later brought him no little derision.

But at length, when he turned his back, Lizzie said she was greatly pressed for time; she had this and that to buy and the eggs to barter, it suited ill with her plans to be standing there gossiping.

"Thou'd time enough for Bob," grunted Tom.

"Ay, for a friend like him one can snatch five minutes or so an' no find ut wasted," she said thoughtfully. Then she walked slowly along the square, and Tom followed. "Did ye want to gi'e me a message for my father?" she inquired.

"Not I," answered Tom crossly. "When I've owt to say to a body I say ut masell, an' then I'se sure that it reaches. Ask a lass to carry a word o' business!—'tis like holding milk in a syle."¹

"Ay! 'tis little enough we're good for but to jus'tan' by an' gape at the glory o' man."

"Such as Bob!"

"Ut caps me what they wanted wi' women folk

¹ Sieve.

in the Garden o' Eden. First He made Adam an' then He made t' stock for t' farm; an when He'd gotten His hand in, He found He'd no more dough. 'Twarn't that *Adam* found anything wantin'; he'd beasts enough; but 'twas jus' as folk is when they've ended a job—they think theirseln turbel clever, an' 'ld like to try ower again. An' so He must pull a lump oot o' t' side o' t' biggest bannock an' set about shapin' another. An' once bakin'-day was past, matters couldna be altered."

"Wair's wantin' things changed?"

"Naebody," answered the girl. "Sensible folk'ld fain bide as they be, lest a worse thing befall them."

"Nay, I wasna speakin' o' changes for t' better," put in Tom, suddenly conscious of a new mode of attack. "There's one or two things I could like well to see altered."

"Nay, really?"

"Ay, really! an' I'd tell thee soom o' them now, if thou'd not been sae pressed for time."

Now Lizzie knew well enough that Long Tom himself had no leisure for courting in Thordale Market Square, so she stopped with a little smile of malice and a little blush of pleasure as she answered—

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"Nay, Tom, if ye've owt o' yer mind, I can let t' eggs bide for a bit."

"Ay ! but I maun be after yon bullocks," he said slowly, as much taken back by her readiness as before by her jibes.

But Lizzie was so pleased to have scored and to have him at a disadvantage that she readily consented to meet him outside the town when the work of the market was over. She was to ride home with Sim, she explained, and there could be no harm in his joining them.

So it fell out about sunset that the three set off homewards down the dale road, and since Sim had a flock of sheep to take back there was no undue hurry.

And when they came to the field-path that cuts a good mile off the way, it was Tom who proposed that they two should stretch their legs a bit while Sim took round the horses.

"We'll meet thee at t' lane end ; an' 'tis cold for t' lass ridin'."

So it all came about as naturally as if it had not been foreseen by all three. Lizzie admitted she was a bit starved¹ ; Sim warned them to be at the

¹ Cold.

stile in time, and Tom, reaching up for the girl, said they "wouldna be late whatever."

The twilight was closing in, the grass looked grey and rough with a heavy dew, and an autumn mist was rising that had almost the sting of frost. The path was narrow and steep, and they went their way slowly.

"I was to tell thee," said Tom, "o' the things I want changed for the better."

"Best let things bide as they be," said Lizzie tremulously, for her heart suddenly misgave her.

"But they winnot," said Tom; "things winna bide as they be, they either gang forret or backward."

"That's the pity."

"Pity or none, we maun through wi' it; an' thou wouldstna bide a bairn all thy life long?"

"Ay, but I wad!" sobbed Lizzie, drawing back from his arm.

"What is't thou'rt flayed on? I thought there was naught 'ut could daunt thee!"

"Nay, if I knew what, I shouldn't be daunted," whispered the girl. "'Tis that I don't know."

"Eh, lassie! I wad wait till there *were* summut afore I called out. An' look at ut as thou wilt,

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thou'st less to fear wi' a settled man 'ut has a home o' his own an' brass in his poke than thou'd have wi' a lad o' thy own age wi' his siller to addle. An' if I be dowlie an' middle-aged, sure thou'rt young an' gay enough for both."

"Ye're not dowlie."

"Not wi' thee by my side."

"Nor just middle-aged either ; I but said ut to anger ye."

"Then thou missed o' thy mark."

"Ah ! but ye *were* angry, I saw how ye bit yeer lips, an' then I was sorry."

"Ay, that I can well believe ! Thoo looked sorry !"

"Oh, Tom, we maun hurry ; we'll be late, an Simon mustn't be kept."

"Time enough, lassie, when I've gotten thy answer."

"Ye've asked nowt 'ut wanted an answer."

"Wilt ha'e me or no ?"

"An' if I say no ?"

"I'd but ask thee again to-morn."

"An' if I say ay ?"

"'Twad be a savin' o' trouble."

"I was askin' Janey what ut was like," she said later, with a low, happy laugh.

"What what was like?" queried Tom.

"To be—to be kissed by a man."

"An' what said she?"

"Nay, she wad tell me nowt."

"An' what is't like, noo thou'st tried ut?"

"'Tis like—'tis like t' flick o' a cow's tail when ye
milk i' the rain!"

CHAPTER VIII

HUSH-MONEY

WHEN Antony woke from his uneasy slumber in the hayloft the doings of the night before haunted him like the memory of an evil dream. In the chill morning it seemed scarce credible to him that he, Antony Heseltyn, had done a man to death. He had slept in the barn, wet as he was, rather than risk meeting his father, for whom he felt so passionate a hatred that he mistrusted his own self-control.

The grey mist of autumn hung over the fells like a pall; he stayed himself unsteadily against the doorpost and looked down across the valley, a haggard, unkempt figure of despair. For the early morning frost takes hold of a man who has fasted twelve hours and slept little. Antony set about his work mechanically, with a plodding

industry that had never before been his. He had long finished his usual morning jobs before he saw the smoke of a kindled fire curl up from the Barerakes' chimney.

Betsy eyed the two Heseltynes furtively as they sat down to break their fast in squalor and silence. Hers was a courage that returned with the daylight, not shrinking from the hands that dealt, nor the head that planned death in the darkness. As she passed along Black Syke Lane on her way up to Barerakes she had satisfied herself, with scarcely a tremor, that the Scot had gone to his last resting-place. And her eyes had a cat's humour as she watched the two in their sullen silence—two whom a word from her would send to the gallows. It was not in her plan to show her knowledge too early; this power of hers she hugged to herself in triumph—greed, revenge, and ambition to be satisfied by a few short words.

"Thy wrist has bled through the binding," she said to Tony. "Shall I wash it and strap it anew?"

Heseltyne glowered at his son.

"'Twill heal best wi' least meddlin'," said Antony.

"As thou please," she said carelessly; "only folk'll think 'tis a big hurt wi' yon stain."

"I've set t' scythe where it will cut no one else," he went on, looking across at his father. And even as he gave him this timely hint it touched him nearly that he should have to play the game of the Black Dog now and for all time. He would have to screen and shelter his father for the sake of his own neck; with more than his old hatred, he could no longer stand aloof or hold himself of different clay.

Heseltynne glanced towards Betsy to see if she really believed the tale she had been told, and she broke into a laugh that was little reassuring.

"What's to do now?" he asked menacingly; "I see nowt to laugh at wi' such carelessness. They are dangerous things, scythes. Ye'll mind Jemmie Sunter cut his throat wi' one."

"'Twas saving t' hangman wark!"

Antony pushed back his plate and stood up. "Thou'lt be goin' to t' market," he said, and his father nodded.

"An' to-day is the reckoning-day," threw the girl over her shoulder; "the day 'ut the Scot gets his dues. Ye'll not be forgetting it?"

"Is't likely?" growled Heseltynne.

"Ay—nowt more! Though happen a man like

that gets his money easier than a servant wench who has to ask ten times over for her bit o' brass."

"Thou'lt get thy dues like t' Scot if thou wait long enough," laughed Heseltynne grimly, as he took his whip from the gun rack and went out into the porch.

Antony passed the long morning in a sort of fevered industry that dared not be idle. After satisfying himself that no tell-tale traces had been left in Black Syke Barn he busied himself about the farm, doing many a job that had been put off, and still would have been put off indefinitely but for this sudden lust for occupation. The folk of the dale were not wrong in calling Heseltynne a bad farmer, and Antony lacked training and inducement to set things on a better footing. It was the rule at Barerakes to let the farm go with a little less than the least possible work and outlay. The time the father grudged from alehouses and from certain illicit industries the son grudged no less. Had he worked his best at the farm not a penny more would have come to his own pocket, whereas he did earn a certain amount at the wrestling bouts which had brought him fame throughout the North Riding as Tony the Wrestler.

Fear of his father's violence had enforced the half-hearted performance of the strictly necessary ; but it had seemed a little thing to Heseltynne that the byres should be dirty and ill-kept, the land little tilled, and the whole farm disorderly. And until now Antony had had small inclination to work either for its own sake or as a rest from the terrors of thought.

He came back to his mid-day meal with a hard-earned composure that Betsy knew well how to shake.

"An' hoo dosta like this last job thy father has gotten thee ? An' hoo is ut likest to end ?"

"What dost *thou* know of it ?" he asked uncertainly.

"Nay, what should I know but what I be told ? Did'st thou not tell me thou wert riding the gibbet hill to pleasure thy father ?"

"Dosta think it could pleasure me ?" he returned roughly.

"Folk'll do owt for gold or for fear ; thou kenst best thyself which."

Tony swallowed with a dry throat, but raised his glance hardily and met Betsy's gaze.

"I deal as little wi' one as the other," he said

slowly, looking at her with a certain brutality before which she quailed; nor did she dare to question him further.

But when the evening came and the work of the day was over Antony started out by a roundabout way for the Thirkells' farm. He was still ignorant of the extent of their booty, though it was to him that they owed their success. Moreover, he would fain hear how Thordale had received the fact of the Scot's absence.

Braebottom stood by the turnpike side, but a little back from the road, near by to where Syke Gill joins the river. Scarcely more than a stone's throw from the last house in Wrathe, it had yet an air of courting seclusion, and the house itself looked forbidding and desolate.

As Antony fumbled at the chain of the garth gate he fancied he saw a shadow slink in to the wall-side, but he gave little heed to it at the time, and strode on towards the house.

As he paused in the porch he caught the sound of the Black Dog's voice raised in angry discussion; he heard, too, a startled exclamation and a shuffling of feet as he rattled his stick on the door. For some moments there was silence

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within, and then a woman's voice called out cautiously—

“Wair is’t ?”

“’Tis I, Antony Heseltyne,” he called back softly, and he pressed down the latch. But the door was barred, and he had to wait while they slid back the complaining bolts.

“Is’t really Antony ?” said the woman again, and she held the door at a foot opening to peer mistrustfully into the darkness.

“’Tis Antony Heseltyne sure enough,” he answered impatiently, “though if ye keep me this long at the door-cheek there’ll happen coom others.”

“Coom thy ways in,” said the woman sullenly. “We wanted but thee to ha’e all t’ ne’er-do-weels o’ the township by the one fireside.”

Antony’s eyes wandered over the company ; then he nodded his head almost gaily. “’Tis a bonny assemblage,” he said sneeringly, “yet I miss some old friends to complete ut.”

He walked up to the hearth defiantly, and looked round at them smiling.

“Had ye forgotten to bid me to the dance, or did ye make sure o’ my comin’ ?”

They turned surly, suspicious eyes on each other, but a chorus of muttered execrations was all he got for an answer.

"I see how it is," he went on scornfully; "a set o' curs that ha'e wrested the bone from a betther dog, an' each wanting the whole on't."

"We'se here to see fair play," growled Alderson. "We'll have t' gold reckoned out an' a fair division. A man doesna risk his neck for a few pence and empty promisin'."

"Turn out the gold, man," said Antony, pointing his stick at Matt Thirkell. "Dosta think we'se content to let thee an' my father sit warm on the lot an' dole us a sop as it please you?"

Thirkell's fingers twitched at the bag uncertainly; his eyes sought the Black Dog and he tried to parley.

"Thy father an' me——" he began.

"'Tis nowt to the point what devilry ye ha'e hatched up between you," thundered Tony. "I speak for us all; let us see t' colour o' the gold and heark to the ring of ut."

"Ay! thou speaks well, Tony lad! I was for havin' thee sent for fra the very first."

"Ye're an honest man, Jerry! an' I doubt not

ye'd ha'e fetched me yersell had yer legs been but longer. There be six of us in ut," he went on. "Set the brass in six heaps an' leave wranglin' whether has t' better right, the man who thought first or the man who hit last. We all are alike i' this; each has nobbut one neck for the hangman."

"Tony has t' right word," said Jem Thirkell; "we may sit here till doomsday if we wait till we all are content. Tip the gold out on the table, we'll draw i' turn till the last piece."

But as Matt gave way unwillingly there came the sound of a heavy hand knocking against the outer door, and it startled them into silence. And when the money had been shovelled back into the bag and hastily slipped under the settle cushions the woman went once more to the door and called to know "What was to do?"

"'Tis I—Betsy Middlemas; I ha'e word for Tony, for the lot o' ye, that willna bear keeping."

"Shall I let her in?" said the woman, looking doubtfully towards Antony.

He shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"She's smelt out the hush-money likely; we can choose whether she tell her tale to us or to others,"

"Let's hear what she has to say," said Jem. "Happen it's nowt after all."

Betsy slipped the shawl from her head as she looked round to see with whom she had to deal. The kitchen seemed hot to one who had crouched in a cold porch till her courage had almost failed her, and even the red glow of the fire and the light of one guttering candle dazed her eyes.

There was something daunting in the backward jar of the door-bolts, something sinister in the ruddy picture before her, with its shifting eerie shadows—something almost terrifying in the silence of the men who waited to hear her speak.

Matt Thirkell stood slouching at the end of the settle, his back scarce straightened after his hasty disposal of the money. Heseltynne glared at her from behind the table, a black and yellow mask above the candle, and Jerry Alderson and the younger son of Matt Thirkell sat on either side of the fire. Jem Thirkell had turned towards the door when she entered, and now stood close at her elbow regarding her curiously.

"An' what ha'e ye to say to Tony that's so pressing?" he asked of her churlishly.

She half turned her face and looked at him with

eyes that so betrayed her fears that his fancy leapt to the notion she came with a warning.

"Is there danger afoot?" he asked breathlessly.

But she turned from him without answering, looking at Antony in silence—at Antony who stood in the middle of the hearth, a tall figure of insolent courage and manhood. The firelight glowed and played upon him, casting a great shadow across the floor and rafters, and showing up the strength and beauty of youth that had always attracted her, yet never more than now when she came to threaten its very life. He smiled down at her with his head thrown back in a sort of disdain, and the knowledge came to her suddenly that threaten as she might she would never betray him. Yet how could she sell her secret otherwise?

Then Jem laid a hand on her shoulder, shaking her back to consciousness.

"Say what you will and begone," he said angrily. "Ye'll not have come merely to see and be seen?"

She jerked her shoulder out of his grasp. "Ay! Jem Thirkell," she said, "Ise say what I ha'e to say, never ye fear; but I like best to see the company I'm in afore I open my mouth."

"I hope ut pleases thee?" said Antony drily.

"Ay," said the woman, with more spirit, while the colour came back to her cheeks; "ay, it's as bonny a company as ye'd get on the outside o' Bridewell. There's Matt Thirkell that wears his hair over his forehead to hide a gashed temple; there's blear-eyed Alderson nursing a broken finger, an' Jake wi' a swollen head. The man must ha'e made a grand fight 'ut took six such as ye to kill!"

"Keep thy hands to thyself, Jem Thirkell—thou that find'st it easier to hit a woman than face a man."

"What dosta want?" roared Heseltyne.

"Want, master? I want my wages, I want the money 'ut's been owing me sin' Candlemas. Do you think Barerakes, that cheery an heartsome 'ut a lass wad choose to bide there for nowt, or for love o' Black Dog Heseltyne?"

Antony laughed and stretched himself, passing a hand over his hair.

"Thou'st gi'en each one of them a kind word in his turn; hasta never a word for me?"

She looked at him with hunted, angry eyes.

"For thee? Ay, many! a word for each kiss thou hast gi'en me, a curse for each promise. A curse

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for thee, an' yon dark-eyed wench, an' the bairn to be born to sorrow."

But he laughed at her carelessly, as he might at a player who mouthed and ranted to please him; and the hot words died in her throat.

"Thou'st mistaken thy calling, Betsy lass; thou minds me of a ruddle-faced gipsy quean I heard i' a fair booth."

Then he changed his tone and strode up to her.

"Thou com'st like the crows come at the smell o' carrion, but a crow is ill-fed when the dogs are picking the bones. What chance has one woman?"

"There be more ways than one o' stopping a wench's tongue," put in Thirkell.

"Ah," laughed the woman recklessly, though her cheeks paled at the threatening faces, "ye think I am one to put my head in a noose wi'out forethought? But if ye killed me, I ha'e told the tale to another. There were two of us hidden by Black Syke Barn, and two can swear to the murder. And if the one be silenced, the other'll see ye get justice."

Some of them cried out that the thing was unlikely, but Antony interposed.

"Nay," he said, slowly, "the wench is speaking

the truth ; she an' me's auld comrades, and I know when she's wetting her lips for a falsehood."

Then the men drew aside, speaking together in low whispers until they came to some sort of agreement, but Antony stood aloof from the discussion with real or affected indifference.

"I'd like fine to ken," he laughed, "what sort of a mate thou hast gotten ! Dosta think to feather a nest for yeerseln an' live soft on one Scotchman's guineas ?"

"I think to live softer than thou."

"'Twad not be a hard matter !" he answered moodily ; and as he spoke the dark cloud of the morning seemed to settle down upon him once again. He turned his face towards the hearth and stared into the firelight, piecing out in his thoughts the prospects that lay before him—drear and grey at the best, and the fear of death for a background. He heard little or nothing of the jangle of voices beside him, not even when Betsy's rose shrill above the men's in her angry excitement.

"'Tis all thou'll get," said Thirkell ; "thou can take it or leave it."

"Ay ! but how can I be sure of it ? let me have

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the hard money i' my hand, and I'll feel myself safer."

Then Antony looked up suddenly, turning to Betsy as if he alone were to settle the matter. "The day thou wedst yon sweetheart o' thine, thou hast a flock o' sheep to thy dowry. 'Tis like enough he'll not ken at the first what a sorry bargain he's gotten, but he'll rue it afore he has done wi' thee, blood-money and all."

BOOK II

THE REAPING

CHAPTER IX

DARKENING DAYS

IT fell on a day in early winter, when folk's minds were led to consider the needs of fuel by the bite of a warning frost, that Jem Thirkell jolted slowly along the moor road towards Broad Moss Colliery.

He had been late in starting, for the morning was well on before he passed the last hamlet on the hill-side. Far up the fell, on the furthest white twist of the road, two specks of carts crawled slowly forward, bent on the same quest as his. He looked up at them, being little pleased at the sight, for it reminded him that it was first come first served at the pit's mouth, and that late as he was his turn might be long in coming.

A dreary enough road, this pass to the Broad Moss pit, climbing the narrow nose of Barefoot End, twisting around limestone scars, with here and there a slab of the naked rock for roadway, which the wild thyme tried to cover when summer came

north. And then, when Barefoot End had been climbed, the road turned its back on Thordale and the works of man, and clung to the edge of the hill a track deep sunk in black heather.

It was when Jem got down from the cart at the bottom of Barefoot End that he saw another cart coming down the cross-track from Blairthrop. There was a small, shallow valley lying to his right, between the Broad Moss road and High Stone Nick, and a green way across the heather cut off a good corner to such as came over High Stone Pass out of Blairthrop. He thought to himself with some satisfaction that there was at least one man who would be served after him, and he looked back at the cart, trying to make out which of the Blairthrop men it might be. It so chanced, however, that his own galloway, being old and hard-worked, and the green track being downhill from higher fells, the cart steadily gained on him until it became a question which of the two would first reach the fork of the roads. And as the cart came nearer and more into Thirkell's vision he looked across at it with increasing attention, so that he forgot to urge on his own horse, shading his eyes in puzzled bewilderment.

"If it were not on the High Nick road," he said to himself, "I could swear it were Tony Heseltyne, yet why he should come such a roundabout way caps me."

Then he rubbed his eyes and looked again, stopping in the road to see yet clearer; but look as he might he seemed to recognise the long, swinging pace and the broad shoulders of Antony.

Hurrying after his cart he took the next bend at more of a pace, but this only enabled him to reach the fork just as Antony passed it, and the two carts jolted up at a few yards' distance, though Heseltyne's had the advantage.

Thirkell was uncertain whether Antony had recognised him or not, he was stalking along at his horse's side, and his eyes concerned themselves with little beyond the roadway. Cracking his whip, he hailed Tony by name, so that he turned and looked back.

"Thou'st come by a middlin' queer road," said Thirkell, as he caught up the other. Antony looked at him in a sort of lazy indifference.

"I hadna time to wait till they built me a better," he answered.

"A better?" asked Thirkell. "Why didn't thou come by the straight road?"

"Why, so I did," answered Antony, as they paced slowly up the hill between the two carts.

"An' thou callest it the banest road fra Barerakes to clamber up High Stone Nick for the pure pleasure o' comin' down?"

"Wair tell't thee I came fra Barerakes?"

"Ah," said Jem, "then thou'st had business in Blairthrop?"

"Ay, thou may'st call ut business; 'twas hardly pleasure," said Antony bitterly, and he turned his head to look at Thirkell. "'Tis my weddin'-day; thou'rt the first that can wish me joy!"

Jem looked at the dirty tumbril-cart and then at Antony in his work-a-day clothes, and he judged it safer to listen in silence.

"Ise gi'e thee no handsiller, for I scarce feel to be wed."

"And where hast thou left thy wife?" said Jem. "And how comes Jane Harker to wed thee in Blairthrop—I reckon it is Jane?"

"Ay, 'tis Jane sure enough," said the other moodily; "she's an aunt living i' Blairtown, and not being much i' the mind for merrymakin' she was wishful to be wed where least knew her. She'd be fainest of all if she could keep her folk fra all knowledge."

He strode on in silence, his thoughts going back to that morning's brief ceremony and leavetaking. He had attempted a rough caress when they parted; the occasion had seemed to demand it; but she had suffered it merely in shrinking disgust, and had turned on her way with never a word of farewell as he rode up the valley.

It was not from any sense of comradeship with Thirkell that he poured out his tale, but rather from some inward necessity to speak and give vent to his feelings.

"I took t' cart for a blind, startin' away by starlight lest Betsy should guess at my errand. But I took other horse gear i' t' cart bottom, and when I came to the bottom of High Stone Pass I loosed out and yoked anew. And I left the cart on the hither side o' yon wall, and rode down into Blairthrop and so to Blairtown."

"And thou'st not let t' grass grow under thy feet to be back as early as this," said Jem, adding his own conjectures as to what he should have done in Antony's place. "But there's one thing certain," he said in conclusion; "I'll not set out to lead coal the day I be wed—I'd as soon think o' dancing at my own funeral."

"I'd not talk o' weddin's till I happed on a willing wench," said Antony, nettled; "and 'tis likest thou'lt be saved the expense of a buryin'."

He ran forward to his horse's head as he spoke, leaving Jem no chance for a rejoinder, for a laden cart was returning from the pit, and the roadway was narrow for passing.

"Is there many waiting at Broad Moss?" asked Heseltynne of a lanky, misshapen lad who limped by the cart-side. But the boy looked from one to the other in a sort of quaint terror, nor answered a word.

"Is there many at Broad Moss?" repeated Jem, but the lad answered in a scarcely articulate mumble, and hurried his cart clattering forward.

"Jim Benson lad, isn't he?" said Tony, looking down the hill after the boy. "He was always a bit fond."

"Ay," answered Jem, "daft sure enough, but 'tis summut fresh that 'a cannot answer a plain question."

"What was it scared him, thinksta?" he pursued, after a moment's silence.

"Nay, how should I ken? Ut needs little wi' such a maddled mooncalf as yon," said Antony carelessly.

"'Tis generally set up if a man but take note of him ; and for thee 'a had a fancy above ordinar'. I've seen him o' market-days standin' wi' his tongue hangin' oot o' his mouth, an' his eyes watchin' thee for all he was worth—more like a dog shepherding. Ever sin' thou threw Peacock he's held thee higher than God in heaven—and look at him now, slinking past as if the Old One were after him."

"Thou'rt making a great set over a lyle matter. Ye canna reckon wi' daft folk, and it makes little odds either way. I tell thee what," he continued, "thou'st flayed o' thy own shadow these days. If a man speak thee fair he's trying to trap thee, an' if he be uncivil thou seest a hangman's cord in his hand. Thou shouldst ha'e reckoned this out before thou took to t' road. Didsta think thou could'st rob wi' no risk ? "

"There's too many in 't," growled Jem uneasily "If a man set out to fetch water 'a should see to ut the pail has no holes."

"Ay! but 'tis little good lookin' once t' water's drawn."

They had come to a more level bit of the road, and Antony scrambled in over the cart end,

setting his horse to a trot. There could be no more conversation while the jolting rattle of the tumbrils continued. Jem sat on his cart-front in sulky despondency, and Antony drove standing, a swaying, whistling figure of unconcern.

To see others apprehensive was always a whet to his courage, and he had his own opinion of the men who bore the same risks as himself—an opinion he was at no trouble to conceal in these early days.

And at last the rough road took a northward bend. Leaving the edge of the hill it had hitherto followed, it climbed a little crest and ended by some grey slag-heaps and a turf-roofed shed. A row of empty carts stood waiting, their shafts pointing up into the skyline, like the teeth of a comb. One other was setting out homewards with its burden of coal as Antony leapt down and backed his horse into position before loosing the harness.

"Have ye had long to wait?" he called over his shoulder, while he busied himself with a buckle.

"I set out by starlight," was the answer; "and ye'll be lucky if ye get served afore dark."

With this encouragement Tony led his horse towards the narrow door of the shed. The air

from within met him, hot, heavy, and malodorous. There was a confused murmur of men's voices and the rattle of horse-chains; but one voice rose clear above the rest, so that it caught the ear of the newcomer.

"Where was he last seen?—tell me that! I'll wager a man like yon'd not turn his head homewards wi'out his addlings but there must ha'e been foul play o' some sort."

The hand on Jerry's bridle-rein gave a backward jerk, but the horse scented comrades in the reeking darkness and neighed shrilly.

Straightening his back once more after passing under the low lintel, Antony pushed cautiously forward into the flickering light of a great fire, his eyes unused to the darkness. The fire and the streak of daylight through the open door showed him a group of men clustered round a rude hearth. Gusts of wind swept down the wide chimney, puffing great clouds of smoke into the heavy air, there to hang in misty wreaths about the low rafters. Some ten men sat in the fire-light; beyond, in the misty shadows, the tethered horses of each. And since Antony's advent had startled the talkers the clanking of bits and the

steady munching of the horses alone broke a silence that would otherwise have been notable.

Antony drew Jerry's tether through a ring in the wall and turned to the fireside group with well-assumed hardihood. His eyes, grown used to the twilight of the shed, took in the company in detail, and his lips twitched in amusement to see Dick Harker, his brother-in-law—Dick, who little dreamt of this new connection.

"When he does ken," thought Heseltyne, "he'll keep a quiet tongue in his head for his sister's sake. If I had to marry I couldn't ha'e chosen a better family."

And since his thoughts ran that way his eyes lingered smiling on Dick, until the lad reddened and turned his face into the shadow with a feeling of guilt. Dick had shared his younger brother's ill-concealed admiration for Antony, yet here he had sat listening in silence while men from up and down dale had ranked him a cowardly footpad. He had not cared to raise one voice against such odds, but his heart had a sudden uplifting at the sight of the man himself; here, as he assured himself, was no thief and murderer. Tony the wrestler had always played

fair, and it came to Dick as yet further proof of innocence that Jane had always thought well of him.

Antony looked down at the upturned faces until the silence almost daunted him.

"Have ye wagged your tongues stiff wi' your lang waiting?" he asked. "I thought to hear talk enough when I landed up."

"Happen thou'st the usual luck o' listeners," growled the end man on the bench; but he choked back the rest of his sentence unsaid when Tony laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Were ye talkin' o' me?" asked Heseltyne threateningly; "I've just happed in good time to join in. Let's hear what sort of a tale ye ha'e made for a pastime."

"Let be," said the other sulkily, moving his shoulder restlessly under Antony's grip. "A man may talk o' the king, and I never heerd yet 'ut Tony Heseltyne was his better."

"Ye be one o' those that care not to throw muck if there be not a wall to crouch under," said Antony scornfully. Then he turned his head to the opposite bench. "Sit warmer, lads," he said, with an affectation of gaiety. "There'll be

room and plenty for a little one, if ye close a bit in."

The end man moved instinctively along, but his neighbour did not budge an inch.

"Find thyself a seat whar thou wilt," he said truculently; "we'se not sweat for late comers like sheep in a pen. Thou shouldst ha'e coomed earlier, if thou wanted a warm seat."

As he spoke they heard the clatter of the coal trollies coming towards the mouth of the tunnel, and at the same time Jem Thirkell led his horse into the shed. Antony did not turn with the rest to look at this latest arrival, but stood aside and watched the groups narrowly. If matters were as he suspected, he looked to see them treat Jem Thirkell with scantier ceremony than himself, since Jem had never been greatly loved in the dale. And as Thirkell came nearer Antony saw the men exchange looks, nor did any give answer to his greeting.

To this, however, Thirkell gave little heed; he was passing his horse's reins through the wall-ring when a sudden voice spoke with authority.

"Lads, here be two load o' coal an' two men scarce loosed out, and the benches full already.

Let these two tak' each their load and be gone ;
we'se feel freer wi'out them."

The dark-faced collier looked at the speaker in surprise ; since he had worked at Broad Moss pit it had never been known that a man should be served out of his turn. And Dick Harker and Ebby Blades called out in dismay and disagreement, when they saw their waiting prolonged now their patience was well-nigh ended.

"Nay," cried Ebby ; "are we to wait here from near dawning and a man to ride off wi' our load when he's nobbut just put his nose into t' shed ?"

"Do ye think I've nowt to do at home," growled Dick, "that I care to sit here until Doomsday ?"

But the man who had spoken gave little heed to the lads' objections ; and he raised his voice again in pregnant insistence.

"Let these two tak' their loads and be gone. 'Tis true we'se all ha'e to wait by so much so longer, but ut winnot be all loss."

Jem looked across at Antony in sudden, cowed distrust ; he began fumbling mechanically at the horse tether ; but Heseltynne recognised that to slink off without a word was a dangerous retreat.

"We'se willing to bide wer turn wi' t' rest," he

said coolly. "Because we be late i' comin' is not reason enough to be served early. We'll bide wer own turn."

"Is 't reason enough that we choose ut?" asked Will Bentham; "or dosta want a betther?" He spoke threateningly, and Thirkell itched to be going.

Antony shrugged his shoulders as one who declined further argument with a madman.

"Nay, I'se not ill to convince to my ain profit," he said contemptuously. "I'se too fain to be gettin' home to care whether ye've reason or none for yeer fancy. Let's tak' them at their word, Jem; happen if we stand here gapin' they'll be of another mind."

He loosed Jerry, nodding ironically to the company as he passed out of the door.

"Ye shall not forget t' day 'ut ye befriended a poor orphan lad," he said airily; "and 'twad be addin' kindness to kindness if ye'd settle t' reck'ning!"

"Honest brass is addled too sparely to strew broadcast; we'se ha'e to learn o' thee how to pick oop gowd by t' wayside afore we turn open-handed," flung back Will Bentham. But he could not be sure that the taunt had reached its mark, for Antony was already outside.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST SNOW

It had been Market Day in Thordale, but folk jogged homewards betimes, as the birds seek shelter. The joys of bargaining waned, as the day passed, with ever-increasing speed. The poor beasts cowered miserably in the searching wind, and the pinched, mottled faces of buyer and seller peered at each other through an atmosphere of driving, choking snow-dust. Black sky lowered overhead, and below was this whirling mist of snow, that was beginning to wipe out landmarks, and had already blurred Thordale into a spectre-like vision of shifting grey.

Tom Routh cursed the necessity that had brought him to Thordale, and then he paused when he remembered that he must pass near Crossriggs on the way home, and that he might set off early. To

him, as to others, the alehouse kitchen seemed a haven of refuge after the market square, and the hot whisky and water a draught to wipe out all memory of discomfort. But he took his glass standing, lest he should be overcome by the flesh, and he rode out of Thordale with a heart warmed with liquor and the prospect of a glimpse of the lass he now called his own, though, as he often grumbled, a man need call naught his own when he took to courting.

Between Thordale and Crossriggs his spirits underwent a change in battling with the storm. It was little of the country he could see for snow-clouds, but he soon found himself making tardy progress along the snow-covered road. Already, though not long past noon, the day had the appearance of early twilight ; and he recognised that if he called at Crossriggs at all it must be for the merest greeting.

And when at last he reached Crossriggs lane-end the snow clung thick to his maud, it had found its way into every crevice, and was ever renewed when it melted, like a chilly poultice, between his neck and his storm-collar. The air seemed thicker than ever, and the flakes grew larger, but he flung caution to

the winds and dismounted, leading his horse up the hill towards Crossriggs.

It is the characteristic of a snowstorm that it wraps the world in a sort of boisterous silence ; but up at Crossriggs, sheltered as it was from the north by a belt of firs, the silence grew almost uncanny. Tom and his horse stumbled along in the drift of the narrow way and (the path being no longer distinguishable) up to the door itself, where he knocked with numbed fingers and waited in shivering impatience. Soft snow clung to the misted window-panes, so that, peer as he might, he could get no glimpse of within. And he had to knock again before a slow step made its way to the door and opened it cautiously.

"Why, Tom, is't thee?" said Matthew Harker, holding the door open with a friendly smile. "Come thy ways in; thou'st chosen a dirty day for an outing."

Tom shook his head ruefully.

"I maunt bide more'n a moment—'tes been a fight hither fra Thordale, and little better nor half-way home, wi' t' storm worsening."

"Well, thou mayest as well step in for a breathing," said Harker, kicking away a sodden fleece that

had lain at the door-crack. "Take thy horse into t' byre an' gi'e ut a mouthful—'twill maybe carry thee home all t' sooner."

And Tom needed little persuading, being only too glad that so prudent a man as Harker should counsel imprudence.

"Thou look'st more like a snow man than a Christian," said Lizzie, laughing. "Thou shou'dst ha'e shooen thy plaid i' t' porch, and not coom in to stand drippin' o' my clean floor."

And she backed saucily from his proffered caresses and bid him wipe his beard.

"I'd talk the less about thy floor, Lizzie, that it might ha'e been cleaner."

"In a house full o' men folk one must look wi' a blind eye. I'se too thrang to do better, and I reckon thou'dst coom nae farther thysell, wi' six men to feed and a body in bed to look after."

"T' missus has taken a cold to her inside," explained Harker, "and Lizzie has all to see to."

"But what's got Jane?" said Tom; "isn't she back fra Blairthrop? If the snow keep on like this she'll have to bide where she is till the New Year."

Lizzie shot a glance at her father, but he was

looking out at the driving snow, and neither spoke for the moment.

“Ay,” said the old man slowly, “she’ll ha’e to bide where she is, and we’s ha’e to fend wi’out her as best we can. She was to ha’e coomed back a week ago, when we get word i’stead ’ut she’d gotten a home elsewhere.”

“She and Tony Heseltynne ha’e gotten wed, ower i’ Blairthrop,” explained Lizzie, when Tom did not even ask a question in his surprise.

“Not Janey!” he said, looking from one to the other in blank astonishment. “Janey that——” But he choked back the words in his throat.

“Ay, Janey,” said her sister, eyeing him narrowly.

“And Tony Heseltynne!” pursued Long Tom, in the same dazed bewilderment.

“Ay! and Tony Heseltynne,” answered Lizzie, with an ever-hardening voice—a voice that hardened itself, not against Jane, but against him and his possible censure.

“But surely ye did not expect it?” He turned to Harker as he spoke. “What’s made her wed sae secret and sudden-like?”

The old man shook his head despondingly.

“’Tis that ’ut touches me hardest. She said she

was flayed to tell; she was flayed o' my anger—I that ha'e never said a hard word to her."

"Nay," said Lizzie softly; and she put her hand on his shoulder, "she wasna frightened o' thee; 'twas t' mother she had i' her mind when she said she was flayed to tell."

"To tell what?" asked Tom tersely; and Lizzie lifted her chin with a fine arrogance as she answered—

"To tell what? Do ye think a girl like our Janey couldn't ha'e looked higher than Antony Heseltyn? Do ye think any girl wad be blithe to own the Black Dog to her man's father? Do ye think any decent folk'd care to be sib to him?"

"Nay, that's true enough," said the man reflectively.

"'Twas no news to me that she cared for Tony—him and she ha'e gone wi' each oother sin' as long as I call to mind. She might ha'e told me t' truth." She said this sadly, with a certain break in her voice, but she added with scarcely a pause, "Ay! an' she would ha'e done but for fear o' gettin' me into trouble."

"An' hoo does her mother tak' it?"

"Hardly," said Harker; "verra hardly. 'Tis

that more than all has made her tak' to her bed. She thought the world of our Jane—ay ! an' so did we all."

"Ay ! an so I do still," burst in Lizzie, with reddening cheeks ; "she's done nowt 'ut can alter that."

"She's putten hersell i' the wrong," said Routh, doggedly.

"She has wed where she luvd."

"An' there's queer tales afoot these days, if one knew what to believe."

"If ye believe all folk tell ye," answered the girl scornfully, "the world'll seem cut after a strange pattern. Tales or no tales, would ye ha'e a lass turn her back on a lad at the first whisper ?"

"I wad have her tak' heed at least ; 'tis little good thrusting one's hand into a hornet's nest."

"Ay ! yon's a man's way, I reckon, an' 'tis good for them 'ut all women dinna think like them. There may be soom 'ut 'ld catch oop their skirts an' pass by, but our Janey's not one o' them."

"But she canna know what folk say o' him—she canna ! She'd as soon ha'e wed t' Black Dog himsell, if she'd heard what I hear."

"Nay, it's just that she *has* heard, that she's wed like this on the sudden. She was aye sorry for him ;

I've seen how near it touched her when folk called¹ him even in jest. And now, when folk are turned against him in earnest, she stands but the closer. Wadsta ha'e me think light of her for that?—I who wad ha'e done no less for the man I luv. There had best be no mistake about this," she went on, in a white heat; "the folk who think ill o' her are less than no friends to me. And them as have owt to say again' Tony can keep their tongues quiet 'till they be out o' my hearin'."

Long Tom nodded his head in chilly agreement.

"Ay! 'twill mak' things no better to listen to tales now t' mischief's dune. If Jane could profit 'twad be another matter, but ye may as well keep as blind and deaf as ye can, now things are past mending. I'd best be gettin' homewards," he added gloomily. "This is scarce the sort o' meetin' I pictured mysell, but my luck o' late's been all o' one pattern."

He looked at the stiff little figure before him and weighed his chances.

"I'se wonderin' when I shall see thee again."

She turned to him with tightened lips that boded ill, as he thought, for satisfactory leavetakings.

"I was thinking the same mysell."

He came a step nearer.

¹ Belittled.

"At least thou might kiss me farewell."

She neither demurred nor assented when he put his arm round her, but looked up into his face, her eyelids heavy with tears. "Think well," she said tremulously, "whether it had best be farewell in good earnest. There's no one wad blame thee."

"And thou?" he asked slowly, "what wouldst thou think o' me?—for I care little for other folk's blame."

"I wad say thou hadst the right of it," she said stoutly. "Thou'st no call to mix thyself oop wi' the Black Dog."

"Yet thou thinkst he can scare me fra takin' a wife?"

She did not answer, though there was a dawning smile in her eyes.

"And it wad be a 'man's way' out of a difficulty so far as I understand?"

"'Twad be some men's," she laughed softly, as one relieved of a burden.

"But it winnot be mine."

"They did tell me," she said, raising her head once more from his shoulder, "that Long Tom was an ill man to lead, and as set on his own way as a clemmed dog to his bone. But till now I wadna believe them!"

CHAPTER XI

A NEW LIFE

THAT was the first snow of a long white winter—a winter during which, for nearly four months, folk saw never a blade of grass throughout the length and breadth of Thordale—a winter of blocked roads, when those living in outlying homesteads were cut off from their nearest neighbours, and were driven to content themselves with such social and material cheer as lay within their own four walls. One at a time, it is true, they might scramble along a dangerous and wearisome route on the quest of some urgent necessity; but when winter was at its worst many a farm could recall a spell of eight weeks when never an outsider's footfall crossed its threshold. From the house to the byre and barns a way was kept cut, with

walls that grew, as the days passed, above the height of a man. But beyond this hardly-kept track, the outside world was little explored by the men-folk, and the women scarce stirred beyond their own doorsteps. Down in the valley the main road east and west had been kept more or less open, and traffic of some sort made possible between the several market towns of the dale, to the wear and tear of horseflesh. And those who dwelt by the wayside (and who were neither careful of their cattle nor chary of their own exertions) could reach out a social hand to each other, if inducements were stronger than bad weather. Between Tom Routh and his mother the state of the roads was a vexed question, so long as the snow remained, he holding to the opinion (though this sounds more plausible than correct) that his word as to their passability was nearer the truth than his mother's.

"Whether is likest to know if the roads be safe ? —an owd woman that never stirs fra t' ingle nook ? or I that be out on them daily ?"

To which she in her turn would answer : "Thou shouldst ha'e had mair sense nor start courtin' at thy age ; but a man ne'er knows when

he be well off, and them as has measles latest oft takes it t' worst."

And Tom was most careful to conceal from her the exploits of a certain day, when with incredible exertions he had reached Crossriggs lane-end in safety, yet with the best will in the world, and with the house almost within shouting distance he had had to go back as he had come, without news or word of his sweet-heart.

A long dark winter for all, and long remembered, this winter that followed McKay's disappearance. Remembered by all for its cold, and by most for its stinted hearths, it was a landmark to fix dates for a lifetime: "The winter the Scot was missing;" "The lang cauld winter;" "The winter Jock Mecca's sheep were overblown, and he and t' lyle lad met their death seekin' them."

But the Harkers, turning their eyes with intent from its darker side, spoke of it only as "the year Tom courted our Lizzie."

A long dark winter for all, yet for one lonely woman up at Barerakes longer and darker than for any, even though the snow that seemed a barrier to most was for her a cloak and a fortress. When

the sky was blackest and the snow fell softly in great flakes that blocked up windows and alleys there came to the poor, tired soul a sense as of rest in a grave, beyond reach of shame for oneself or for those that one loved. But if the sun shone clear, or the snow fell away from the upper windows, so that she could look out over the familiar fells towards Wrathe and Crossriggs, a terror would seize her and the rattle of the door-latch could set her trembling.

"Thou'rt looking for those 'ut'll never coom," said Antony, half in taunt, half to comfort.

"If only I could be sure," she answered restlessly. "When t' sun shines I can never feel safe."

It was on Christmas Eve, when snow lay deep over all the valley, though the sky was clear overhead, that Antony brought in word of a man that was crossing the untrodden garth towards Barerakes.

"Not my father?" she asked him, with whitening lips, catching a shawl from a peg, while the Black Dog laughed till the roof rang.

"He'll be coom to bid thee eat furmety with them, an' let bygones be bygones,"

"Nay," said Antony, "he has more o' Sim's cut, and the way he gets ower t' ground is little like a man o' thy father's age."

Wrapping her big shawl loosely about her she closed the house-door behind her, and passed along the cut-out alley that led to the byres, and when she came out beyond the house-end and looked over the garth gate at the sparkling level of snow, a sob of relief broke from her to see that Antony had been right. For it was Sim, not her father ; and Sim, after all, was in his measure a fellow-sinner, and had hitherto been reckoned the greyest sheep of their flock. She steadied herself against the wall-end, and sought to regain courage and self-control as she watched his slow progress nearer. If God would but give her strength to lie bravely, all might go well, or at least further misery be averted. And ah ! how she longed for news of them all ! how had she borne this silence, this utter starvation ? It was as if a numbed, frost-bitten limb had been recalled to pain and sensation by the warmth of a fire. She had lived for weeks in the apathy of despair, and had prayed daily to be hidden beyond reach of all she loved ; but she waited her brother's coming with passionate im-

patience, and stumbled knee-deep into the drift to cling to him in sobbing welcome. "Oh, Sim," she cried, with too deep a gladness to fear rebuff—"oh, Sim, I never thought to see any of ye again. Are they well at home? Have they forgotten me? Ah, tell me all thou canst think on—I've fair hungered for news o' ye all."

He had come thither at his father's urging, and had planned to meet her with all the official dignity of the justly incensed, but he had not heart to loosen the clinging arms. "Is't news of them thou'rt wanting? thou that left wi' never a word o' farewell, and hast never been nigh us syne?"

But she would not be put by after this fashion. "Thou canst gie me nae hard word that I hae'na said to mysell a hundred times over; and I winnot believe thou cam'st all this way to reproach me." And as she asked him question after question, the careless, kind-hearted lad forgot dignity or affront, and told her all that came to his mind of the family history: his mother's cold; the welfare of the farm stock, and the management it had required to house them safely against the winter; the progress of Lizzie's love affairs; and, lastly, how this visit had been of his father's planning.

"He didna bid me to ask thee down, for t' mother was i' t' house^{*} at the time, an' ut might ha'e been parlous. But I reckon if thee an' Tony came down to-morn, or this side o' t' New Year, there'd be none but would gi'e thee a welcome o' some sort, and he more than all except Lizzie."

But she shook her head and smiled sadly. "I'll wait till the days be longer an' t' winter is over. I think folk's hearts turn kinder as the leaves coom back, and mebbly I'll ha'e mair courage when the sun shines warm, and t' hills are green an' bonny once more."

"Thou look'st nobbut silly-like," said Sim, with the dawn of concern in his voice.

"Nay, there's nowt amiss wi' me," she said hastily, "it's the dowlie weather; I seem fair pinched oop wi' t' cold. I wad ha'e asked thee into the warm, if I'd been alone i' t' house, but I thought 'twad be little news I could hear wi' t' Black Dog standin' by."

"I wonder thou canst bide to live wi' him," said Sim.

"Ay," said the girl bitterly, "and thou wouldst wonder more if thou knew him better. If ever

^{*} Kitchen

they feel to hate me for the wrong I ha'e done them an' t' shame I ha'e brought to their name, 'twad maybe soften their hearts if they kenned I was reaping justly. Nay, I often think God wadna ha'e dealt wi' me sae hardly, but that 'A meant it should be sooner over."

"And is Tony no' what ye thought him?" asked Sim, groping blindly for some word of consolation, yet scarce daring to offer pity to so passionate a wretchedness.

"Tony," she repeated slowly, making in that moment a last clutch at the self-respect and pride she thought to have lost. "Nay, I ha'e no complaint against him—he's all that I thought when I married him; I wasna deceived in him."

And Sim carried these words home to Lizzie for comfort that Christmastide, nor did either know in how bitter a truth they had been spoken. And when the long, dark months of winter were over, when once again the wan hills were bare to the sunshine, and the first celandines brightened the sodden meadows, there had come to Jane, not the rest for which she had prayed, but care for a new life that needed her—a new life that should, she resolved, make good her own shortcomings, and

wipe the recollection of stain from its father's name. Perhaps it was the spring sunshine that brought courage, as she had said to Sim ; or perhaps it came back with her strength as the days grew brighter. Yet more than all it sprang from a new companionship of love in that loveless home ; for here was one who, though innocent himself, could not yet have learnt to point the finger of scorn at his mother. So there came a day when Jane no longer prayed for the forgiven shelter of a grave, but held her head higher, and hoped once again to taste the love and respect of her fellows. She looked at Antony with a fresh tolerance since there had come this added link between them—a link in a measure of sin, but also recalling a former love, and binding it to a present mutual interest. She had called the child Antony after his father, thinking sadly enough that she must not use the names of better men ; but it had seemed to the man a sign that the old love still survived, and he bore himself with a new gentleness towards her, nor could he disguise a certain pride in the child he could call his own.

There came, too, a day when she told herself that Fate had after all dealt fairly in her bargaining. For she had not asked for happiness, or for forget-

fulness of her sin ; she had thrown her whole life into the balance that she might buy happiness for Lizzie—the happiness of ignorance. There was even a hint of generosity in the crumb of joy that was dropped into her unexpectant fingers. For it was nothing less than joy to see Lizzie enthroned in the Black Dog's chair (himself being absent on unexplained business), and to hear her merry tongue run to and fro like a weaver's shuttle among memories, fancies, and projects. It made Antony and Jane draw near to each other to contemplate a miracle of transformation, since neither had dreamed before that the Barerakes kitchen could take on a look of home—a home in which merry gossip, and laughter, and baby-talk could have place.

“When I heard thou hadst a little one o' thy ain, they could keep me away no longer. And eh but I'm glad I coomed ! And it was Tom 'ut telled me HE was away,” jerking her head mysteriously towards that part of the universe she held to be favoured with the Black Dog's company ; “he's the only one I dare ask for news of Barerakes, and he tells me all he hears.”

But Jane's heart warmed to the man for his reticence.

"He'll be cooming to fetch me to-night, and I told him he could wait for me in Black Syke Barn, lest the old man should come back unexpected. Tom says 'a cannot sit i' the same room wi' him, and I didna want there should be fighting or evil speaking. And we think to be wed when haytime is over—so that I get a good spell o' quiet to use me to new ways. We'se be alike i' one thing, Janey, for I think it would puzzle a body to say whether Tony's father or Tom's mother were the cheerier company. Nay, I'se not meaning that she comes any way nigh him for wickedness, and I daresay her intendings are right in the main. Like enough folks get dowlier as they get older, and even Doctor Baines canna cure old age.

"Last time I was ower at Scar End 'twas nowt but tales of middle-aged men wedding light-headed lasses and ruein' the rest of their lives. Soom o' them took to drink, an' soom were for teaching the lass wisdom wi' the end of a besom, and soom o' them gaed away south, and folk heard no more o' them. But however the tale ran, it had always a waeful ending. It isn't so much that I tak' any heed to such talk, but she canna let Tom be at peace, and I can see it fidgets him rarely. Is't

likely a man cares to be asked after the rheumatics i' front o' his sweetheart? let alone tellin' him that she sees the glint of his skull through his hair! An' 'tisen't true neither, she nobbut says it to vex him."

With a visitor of this sort there remained no ominous breaks in the talk to be bridged over with awkward tact. It was few questions she asked; with so interested an audience her flow of chatter was only limited by want of breath, and if she were silent by chance it was when she watched the baby with the quickened curiosity of one who might some day have a little child of her own.

"I canna see that he favours Tony," she said consideringly, "but he hasna thy eyes." And there was a solemn ceremonial when the baby, having been washed under her eyes, was reclothed in garments of her own handiwork—all but the cap, as she explained.

"I had set my heart that his grannie should do him summut, but thou knowst what mother is—as stiff as a bundle of sticks, if she once be offended. So I bought some yarn of a peddling-body, and set to to make yon lyle cap; an' I made syke a bog-gling job 'ut I fair lost patience, an' would ha'e thrown the lot on t' back o' the fire to be quit

on't ! ' 'Tis just so thou shouldst ha'e done,' she would say ; an' there I'd sit watchin' her fingers an' tryin' to take ut all in wi' my poor daft head. An when she'd gotten it all straight again, I would take oop t' needles, an' there'd be anoother dropped stitch ! ' Sakes alive ! ' I would sigh, ' why t' bairn will be a man grown or ever I get to the frill ; I'd best put t' lot i' the fire at once—'tis but losing time an' temper baith.' ' Gie it to me,' she would say, ' I'd as soon finish it mysell as be settin' thee right ; I dinna ken where t' lasses will end, these days—such a simple pattern an' all ! ' Little did I care what she said o' the lasses, so long as she made thee thy cap ;—an' ut sets thee off grandly it does." And she caught up the child recklessly, kissing its pudgy face in a tender prevision of motherhood.

CHAPTER XII

UNPROVEN

THE slow months dragged on towards summer, bringing with them some feeling of security to Barerakes. McKay's disappearance was no longer the one subject for fireside talk, and the lengthening days brought more work and other interests.

The Black Dog himself was as much shunned as ever, but when sheep-washing and clipping came round folk were willing enough to get the benefit of Antony's help at the price of a shortened memory. They reminded each other that suspicions were but suspicions, and talk was but talk. A man, they said, might have a murderer to his father without himself deserving the gibbet, and Tony had always been a rare hand at a sheep-dub, whether for throwing in or for washing.

At this time, too, Tony showed a better face to the world than he had troubled to do in the past, when its good opinion had seemed to him a little matter to be had or left as it pleased him. He had resolved not to run the risk of another such slight as had been put upon him at Broad Moss pit, and without too conspicuous humility he had set himself to win back such popularity as had once been his.

Between Jane and himself the friendlier relation continued, and the child's coming had made Bare-rakes more like a human home. Formerly it had served as shelter and protection from weather or enemies, to which he and his father had turned as a fox to his lair ; but latterly there had been some measure of hope and companionship between husband and wife, and though the house was divided against itself, there were three against one.

"Some day he'll drink himsell to death. There must some day be an end to such ways," the son would say hopefully. "And once he's dead, folk will forget, or we can flit elsewhere where McKay was never heard tell on. I meant him nae ill—his death was none o' my planning. They wad ha'e set me against him at Peggie's, but I wouldna be in it. Whether had t' most

hand i' it—he 'ut planned the whole deed fra t' beginning, or I 'ut was drawn in wi'out thought? He would ha'e gotten away wi'out me? Who knows?" Tony would cry in passionate reminiscence. "There was ma father calling to me I should hang wi' t' rest; I caught at t' bridle wi' no other thought than that the Scot should swear silence. 'Twas all done i' less than a minute. I wish I had letten him gang, but he jagged at me wi' his long knife and it angered me. Had he spoken me fair, him an' me could ha'e dealt wi' t' lot; it wad ha'e been t' better way for us both."

But Jane would look round the kitchen with hunted eyes. "Dinna talk o' what's done, an' what might ha'e been," she would say, trembling. "If it had gone as thou sayst, thy word would ha'e hanged thy father, if thy hands hadna killed him i' t' forehand. God knows he was t' worse man, but a son canna do his own father to death. If we canna forget that night, 'tis little good we get by talking it ower, for I scarce can think of it and keep my senses."

There had come to Jane some hope that the old days of shame and wrongdoing might be lived down in a present totally unlike them. The little

Antony she nursed so lovingly was to be the first of a fresh line. Though she herself seldom ventured back to the home she thought of so constantly, and of which she deemed herself unworthy, this son of hers should be brought up in its traditions, and should some day find there a welcome for his own sake. She no longer shunned her neighbours, and, if they seemed to seek her out, would meet them with some of her old dignity, though the advances never came from her.

Much of the returning tolerance she rightly traced to Long Tom's pity and good offices, and her gratitude led her to keep away from Scar End as the only practical return she could make to her sister's husband.

Little Anty was some six months old when there came men out of Scotland asking pertinent questions as to McKay's whereabouts. McKay had collected for others beside himself, and it was not to be expected that these should sit silent under their losses. And some, it may be imagined, had interest in the man himself beyond the money he carried; so for one reason and another the missing Scot was once more upon all men's lips. Along the well-known beat of the Scotch drovers

the question of his disappearance was widely canvassed. So far south he had gone ; at such a place he had looked in twice in returning ; at Moortown more than one held his quittance for debt due.

But the nearer they drew to Wrathe, the less folk knew of his doings, and what they admitted to know was given with the caution that "'twas nobbut hearsay and ill to depend on." Further north, again, folk knew less and spoke freer ; at Windynick there was talk of a horse found clemmed on the heather with bridle mired and bloodstained, though whether the blood came from its own broken knees or from a thrown rider, who might say ?

"Had he been thrown," said some, "folk wad ha'e found t' body by t' roadway."

"Who can be sure ?" said others ; "the mare may have left the road ; and to seek for a body on the fells was like looking for a pin in a haymow."

Nevertheless, a search was made far and wide, and Blairthrop Pass was held in ill repute.

"Why Blairthrop ?" said Blairthrop men hotly. "Was it not known that the Scot had his face set towards Thordale Head ? Let Thordale men

answer for their own sins ; Blairthrop had records enough without other folk adding by hearsay."

Round Wrathe, as before hinted, the dalesmen were chary of bringing McKay's name across their lips. Those that knew most had most reason to say least ; and those that knew a little and guessed more were shy of airing their suspicions lest they brought their own necks into danger.

Those who had paid their dues to McKay resented his friends' queryings ; those who had not paid disliked the subject yet more. And all had a tacit feeling that the Scots might find out what they could by themselves, but it was never a dalesman's part to throw dirt at his own land for the benefit of a Scot and a foreigner.

"Let them find out for theirseln what they may ; 'tis no affair of ours," said the careless. "If they've as long heads as they say they have, 'twill doubtless be a lyle matter to find so big a man as McKay."

But some less cautious native dropped a hint that sent inquirers on the track of the "Black Heifer," and Peggie, to clear her house of unworthy suspicions, recalled how McKay had set out for Thordale in company with Matt Thirkell and old Heseltyne.

"I dinna ken how far they went wi' him," she added, "for as soon as they ganged oot o' our yard I shut door on them an' gied 'em never a thought fra then till now." And her eyes wandered carelessly towards the old snuff-jar on the chimneypiece in which she kept her savings, and which was heavier to lift up and down at nights than in the days before McKay's disappearance.

So it came to pass that both the Black Dog and Matt were haled to Moortown, there to answer to these suspicions before the justice, leaving their respective households in dread suspense the while.

By roundabout routes Jem Thirkell climbed up to Barerakes to discuss this latest calamity with the Black Dog's son, and to patch up some tale, if need be, in event of the truth leaking out through their fathers' indiscretions.

"I'll stand by thee, Tony lad," he quavered, "and thou'lt do no less by me. 'Tis easy saying that we came oop too late to do any good, and there's Jane here for a witness if need be."

"Folk will ask maybe why we held wer tongues for so long," suggested Antony drily.

"But we can say we were feared to speak," went on Jem eagerly, "and saw not what end it could serve if we had,"

"Ay," laughed Tony grimly, "thou canst say that truly. For 'tis sure enough that the only end it could serve wad ha'e been t' rope-end."

"Dosta think they'll get well through?"

"I think they'll move their tongues warily when they think o' their ain necks. And I see nowt they could gain by betraying others. Nay," he went on more assuredly, "there's sae little to go upon, 'tis easy to brazen ut out; an' t' owd man was never easy to daunt, whatever thy father may be."

"My father's as good as thine," said Jem sulkily.

"Nay, then, thou'rt well off," jibed Tony; "for 'tis few, even i' Thordale and hereabouts, have syke a man to their father."

And the two came back in safety from Moortown—not, it might be said, with flying colours, or with their characters brightened, but the evidence had been too hazy to convict even such deserving scoundrels as these under the most willing justice. The examination had, however, jogged folk's memories and ill-will, so that the day of Jane's hopes seemed indefinitely put off. It is true that the ill-will and disapproval fell more openly to the share of the Black Dog, but the cloud hung over his housemates and well-to-do folk especially

turned a resolutely cold shoulder on any who might be suspected to belong to the gang concerned in the Scotchman's murder, for very few doubted but he had been a victim of foul play.

Once again the winter closed in upon Barerakes—a winter less cold and deadly than the last, but which brought back once more much of the old hopelessness. The Black Dog, having eluded justice successfully, more openly showed the braggart, and more actively resented the scarce veiled antagonism of his son and his son's wife. Both Jane and Antony saw the impossibility of realising their wistful ambitions of a home while the necessity remained of living under the same roof as the father, but the possibility of shaking off this burden had grown no nearer.

CHAPTER XIII

SCAR END

IF, however, they had come to see that those vague ideals were impracticable, there still remained to Jane and Antony a sense of rest after a storm. The Scotchman's friends had failed to make a point against them, and it was little likely that they should happen on damning evidence now they had gone back north to their own land, where (as here) time would haze their memories and cool their resentment.

Jane, looking back to her happy girlhood, recalled a time when her notions of life would not have been satisfied by a numbed feeling of security from danger ; when the sort of comradeship between herself and her husband would have been held unworthy of the name of love ; when the child, who was now her chief thought, would

have been to her a haunting reminder of sin. In her proud innocence she would not have admitted the possibility of sin bringing aught but sorrow and punishment. Nowadays it seemed to her as if she had paid the full measure for wrongdoing, and that brighter days were dawning, when she might hold out her hands once more towards happiness with as much right as her fellows.

It was one bright May afternoon that, her housework being done, she took her knitting into the sunshine and sat in the home meadow with little Antony—in sight of Barerakes, but free from its overshadowing associations.

The child crawled and tumbled in the grass; the distant sound of Black Syke Forss below her caught her ears companionably, and through the greening trees she could look out over the gill towards Crossriggs.

She sat within sight of Barerakes that she might see when Antony returned, and not from any expectation of a possible visitor. Callers were rare enough at the lonely farm, and most were folk like the Thirkells, who came by preference after dark.

This afternoon, however, a moving figure on the

high lane had raised Jane's curiosity, for it was a way few trod, leading only to Barerakes and the high pastures. And as he drew nearer she looked at the man with quickened interest, to note whether he would pass the gateway on the sky-line or declare himself plainly as seeking Barerakes. A tall man it was who could show himself so high above the wall-top, and a long-legged one that could cover the ground so quickly.

He paused at the gate to fumble at the fastening, but finding it stiff and ill to open in his impatience he vaulted over it into the pasture, and swung down the steep hillside, unmistakably bound for the farm.

Putting her knitting in her pocket, she caught up the child, carrying him up the hill as fast as the rising ground allowed. And when the man came once more into sight by the house corner she could see it to be Long Tom, her brother-in-law.

With a beating heart, yet with pleasure born of the sunshine, she hurried to meet him ; and he, seeing her approach, turned his back on the house and came slowly towards her.

She greeted him breathlessly with a face that

could not disguise its eager welcome. Little Anty stretched out a hand full of primroses, and for the moment they met as good friends, without a thought that this was the first actual meeting since Jane had left Crossriggs nearly two years ago.

"How's Lizzie?" she asked at once; "is she well over? Have ye coomed to tell me about it? I had feared I should ha'e to go asking a stranger for news."

But Tom put aside her gratitude and curiosity.

"She has sent me," he said slowly (one might say reluctantly), "to ask ye to be with her when her time cooms. Her mother isn't so well, ye'll maybe ha'e heard that; and she thinks it hard if none of her folk are to be by her."

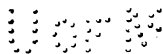
Jane listened in awed unbelief.

"And would ye be willing?" she asked trembling.

Tom turned away his face.

"Not just willing," he answered, "only I see no other way for it; I canna be givin' her my reasons—now least of all."

Jane set the child down on the ground, holding him steady by his skirt.



"Can't ye mak' oop soom tale about the Black Dog?" she asked, with averted face.

"Ay," said Tom. "I spake long enough to that tune; I minded her how they'd had him before t' justice; but she held it nae reason, an' less than nae reason, she said, that her ain sister shouldna be nigh at a time like this."

Jane raised her face appealingly.

"I can do her no harm," she whispered. "Have I not kept away all this time for her sake? Haven't I put her by wi' one thing or another whenever the talk turned to my comin' ower to Scar End? Did I say owt when she cried to me that I was more proud than sisterly, and had forgot the old love and old times? Nay," she added passionately, "what for should I ha'e married to Barerakes, an it were not for Lizzie? Ye think I can harm the child?—I that wad die gladly if it could serve her anyway; I that hold her as high i' my love as God in heaven!"

"I'm no feared ye would harm her," he said grudgingly, and yet with a kind of pity. "I'd maybe do her worse harm if I didna gi'e way. She gangs aboot sorrowful an' fearful; all her talk is o' Janey, and nowt I, or the mother, can say

will do owt to hearten her. When I telled her this morning I'd gang fetch you, she smiled t' first time for a week, and seemed cheered already."

Jane listened with the tears running down her cheeks.

"Ye will let me come," she said humbly.

"I ha'e coomed to ask it," he answered, with always the same unwillingness; and they turned towards the house.

"I cannot promise ye," he went on, "that ye'll win much of a welcome fra my mother. She cannot oft bring her mind to speak civil to such as do not tak' her fancy, and she's a rough tongue wi' her."

"She can scarce speak me worse than Antony's father," said Jane, undaunted and indifferent so long as she might keep this hope of seeing Lizzie.

"Can ye coom back wi' me now?" asked Tom, "or must ye wait to get ready?"

"I canna leave the child," she said suddenly, with visible terror lest this might prove an unsurmountable barrier.

He looked at the sturdy little figure with a mixture of favour and dislike.

"He can come," he said shortly; "I'm not one

to say he should be left at Barerakes wi'out a woman."

"And I maun see Antony," she pursued. "I could meet ye at Wrathe by sundown. Nay," she went on, as if struck by a sudden thought, "twad be better we met beyond Wrathe, or I could walk to Scar End as well by mysell as not."

Long Tom reddened shamefacedly.

"If I've coom to ask help o' ye," he answered, "I'm man enough to be seen i' yeer company. And 'tis a long step fra here to Scar End with a youngster to carry. I've t' horse and cart waiting me i' Wrathe—I'll away back and will fetch ye at yon high gate afore sundown."

"We shall be ready," she said gravely.

Indeed she was ready before she promised, for Routh had scarcely turned off the Blairthrop road when he met the woman and child plodding along to meet him.

"Tony came back sooner than I thought for, and I cared not to wait till his father landed."

It was for the most part a silent drive to Scar End. Tom was anxious and preoccupied, Jane too full of the prospect of seeing her sister to have leisure for talk, and little Antony had already

acquired the art of silence in the presence of his elders, having learnt in a school of hard experience.

Jane had never before seen Scar End, except from the high-road in passing, so she began to look about her curiously as they drove up the occupation lane to the farm. This was Lizzie's home—a pleasant enough spot as seen in the level sunshine. A murmuring cluster of big sycamores shaded it from the north, to the south it looked out over green meadows that already showed a waving flowery prospect of the coming hay harvest.

"We're very backward by you," said Jane, "but ye'll not eat yours as late as we ha'e to up at Bare-rakes."

"Ye'll need all t' pasture ye can get," asserted Routh, "until ye can let t' sheep on to t' fells. Here-away the land lies warmer; I reckon we'd be well over hay-time afore ye're more than begun."

He leapt to the ground, holding out his arms to take the child from its mother.

"He's a rare weight," said Tom, in a kindlier tone than hitherto, and with an effort to make her feel welcome now they had reached his own domains.

"He'll be as good a man as his father before he quits growing."

"As good?" she answered jealously; "I would ha'e him a deal better." And she took him back in her arms and followed Routh into the house.

There was nobody in the big kitchen, and Jane surveyed it critically over the top of Anty's roughened curls. A long, low mullioned window looked out through latticed panes into the green spring twilight. The cosy light of a great fire played on the whitened walls and rough ceiling beams, on the sides of bacon hanging above their heads, on the riddle-cake stored on its wooden rack. To the left of the great hearth ran a long, high-backed settle, to the right stood a box-chair, with a black lamb's fleece for cushion cover. On the high delf rack above the dresser gleamed a goodly array of polished pewter and lustre mugs. On the table lay a tiny cap that had never been worn, the draw-string but half threaded through when it had been dropped uncompleted from the worker's hands.

Jane's thoughts flew back to the comfortless bareness of her own home, comparing it with this evidence of well-to-do and solid prosperity,

unmistakably handed down from no less prosperous forebears. If little Lizzie had married a man old enough to be her father, when folk might have looked to her mating with one as heartsome and young as herself, she had come, at all events, to a well-feathered nest. Loosening the child's outer wraps, Jane set him contented on the hearthrug, and he sat there silently gazing at this new world with round eyes of wonder. The shaggy sheep-dog came and smelt at his curls reflectively, without little Anty turning an eye in his direction, or stirring a hand in his own defence. And when the big man gave him a sweetcake from a jar on the chimney-shelf, the child took it with the same silent wonder that left no room for thanks or gratitude. Nor did he recognise that Tom was considering him with a new tolerance and interest. Anty had long ago decided in his baby head that such animals as wore beards and breeches were hard and surly to deal with—creatures to be avoided and ignored when possible, and at all times unworthy the contemplation of a world-wise philosopher. But here was a man to all appearances—a man at least by the hair and the cut of his garments—and yet one

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who spoke without active ill-will, and dispensed manna such as even his mother had never bestowed upon him. His father, Antony, he had never definitely classed as a man, since, though he wore breeches, his face was not hairy nor his ways often violent, as was the distinguishing habit of the gruff-voiced sex.

"It looks sair homely to see a child on t' hearth," said Routh softly.

"'Tis all that was wanting," answered the woman, turning her eyes to consider Anty thus enthroned. But as they stood there in warmth and comfort an inner door opened, bringing a chill to their perceptions that was more than merely physical. And yet no one but Anty looked towards the new-comer as she paused in the doorway. Tom had his own fears as to his mother's reception of Jane, and Jane waited with a sinking heart and face averted.

The old woman closed the door behind her and came slowly towards the fireside group. Her eyes, unlike her son's, had a hard, keen habit of concentration. Dark and deep-set in the thin, wrinkled old face, they forced the younger woman's to meet them by their blighting, scorching power.

"I would sit doon," she said shortly, waving Jane back from the high-backed chair on the hearth.

"Thou might bid Jane welcome," said her son. "A woman that comes hither at my asking has the right o' civility fra all o' my house."

"'Tis ower new a civility for as auld a body as I be. I ha'e lived at Scar End for nigh sixty year, both servant an' mistress, but 'tis t' first time ane of thy blood bid me welcome hussies and bye-begets wi' 'civility.'"

"I ask thee to keep a civil tongue to my wife's sister and her bairn that was born i' wedlock," returned her son sternly. "If 'tis a new thing for thee to be civil to such as must eat at thy table, thou must learn thyself to it for t' sake o' the lassie upstairs, that has put up wi' a whimsy old woman as few wad ha'e doon. And if that be not enough for thee, I wad ha'e thee think over yon sixty year thou hast lived at Scar End, and say whether or not the man has been master."

The mother looked up at the son with a twinkle of humorous approval.

"Rouths be a pig-headed race i' owt that concerns them," she said, with a certain pride. Then she turned to consider Jane anew.

"What name has the bairn?"

"Antony," said his mother, looking down at the child.

"Ye might ha'e chosen a better."

"What ails ye at Antony?" said Jane quickly. "Wad ye gi'e a son a bonnier name than his father?"

The old woman smiled sourly at the retort, and did not speak again until Tom recalled to her their need of refreshment.

The meeting between the sisters drove all recollection from Jane's mind of anything but the joy of being once more near Lizzie. And its effect on Lizzie was so marked as to silence Long Tom's doubts and his mother's more open hostility.

And in the long night, as they lay together, the elder woman whispered to the other of comfort and courage and hope.

"Die?" she repeated, with a little catch in her voice; "never think such a thing. It wasna my death, that had prayed often and long to be taken; and it willna be thine, that art as good and innocent as the little one God is sending thee."

CHAPTER XIV

JANE'S RIVAL

IN the day of excitement and bustle that followed, little Anty preserved his character of philosopher. He was not heard to make a remark or to utter a cry; he sat on the hearthrug alongside of his friend the collie, or staggered after him on the flags outside the house, and the contemplation of the child's stolid indifference brought peace to Long Tom's ruffled spirits. Even when they brought down a swathed, helpless little bundle and laid it on the settle, Anty regarded this new relation with niggard interest and reserved his judgment. Babies were nothing to this world's citizen, but if his shaggy friend were taken from him he would wander about seeking him, a silent, disconsolate little soul, until he found the dog. And in the days that followed the old grandmother came to

a more friendly understanding with the child. She alone of the household regarded Lizzie's little girl as somewhat of a failure.

"I'd nobbut lads mysell, an' I aye liket t' lads best," she said, obstinately inconsolable. "Look at ut how you will, a lass bairn is a dowlie start."

"I dinna think sae," said Lizzie; "a lass is ever the handier."

But the old woman would watch Anty grudgingly, her discontent silent at first, but not to be denied vent as her admiration grew hotter.

"'Tis summut like a bairn—a right proper man he must ha'e to his father for all folk say o' him; I could like well to see him."

With the cradle beside her she would sit unregardful of it, watching the boy with those hard, dark eyes of hers. And by and by the child gave to her much the same silent comradeship he had accorded to the dog at first sight, so that the two would sit staring at each other from opposite sides of the hearth, and were ill content to be parted. He discovered the knitting drawer under her chair-seat, and held it to be a convenient storage for stones, hen's feathers, and such pieces

of bread or cake as had mastered his appetite at the moment. The old woman chuckled wheezily as she turned over these treasures, rolling her knitting more tightly to leave the more room to them, and not seldom adding a shortcake surreptitiously to the general store.

And when Lizzie found every day some weighty reason why Jane should not leave them, the old woman had no word of opposition. Little as she liked the sad-eyed woman from Barerakes, she was a necessary evil that could be overlooked in the presence of the child. To Jane it was a time of undimmed happiness, a house full of peace and love, a hearth on which she could meet her own folk on almost the old equality. Her father had come over for news and sight of his new grandchild, and little Anty had shared in the honours. Her brothers had met her with a freedom and affection that had been chilled and suppressed by the shadow of Barerakes, or in the formal calls she had paid under their mother's eye.

But the day came when without longer delay she must return to Barerakes and to the men who had been willing enough to spare her for a time in the hope of social gain. It had been undeniably a

step forward that a dweller at Barerakes should have been tolerated at Scar End and a son of a Heseltynne be accounted a welcome guest. But not even for social advantage would the Black Dog and his son put up longer with the discomforts of a womanless house.

At the Thordale market Heseltynne had accosted Long Tom with snarling familiarity, and had asked, in all men's hearing, how much longer they were going to keep his daughter-in-law at Scar End.

"I shall be by to-morn," he said, with the manner of a threat. "If she's doon at t' gate by four o' the clock, we can gang home together; and if not I'll be callin' in for word o' her."

That the Black Dog should call in at Scar End was a thing that must not be—this did not need explanation, and Jane sighed at the death-knell to this happy converse.

"I'll bake i' t' mornin'," she said, "and that will put ye on for a bit."

"If we sit by yon staircase window," said Lizzie, "we'll be able to see him cross by t' brig, and there'll be time enough for thee to get down to t' road afore he pass t' gate."

And so it arranged itself. While the old grand-

mother and little Anty stared their last at each other, the one on the rag hearthrug and the other in her high-backed chair, Jane and Lizzie had their last talk in that improvised watch-tower—a talk somewhat interrupted by kisses and nonsense, and dandling of the most wonderful baby the world had ever seen, being, moreover, the first rival of her sex in Lizzie's affection for her sister.

"Thou'lt miss me less than I thee," said Jane a little wistfully, after Lizzie had twice broken into a sentence of hers with exclamations about the baby. "This little one'll more than fill thy thoughts."

"Thou'st a little one o' thy ain, and shouldst know what it is," answered Lizzie. "There was a day when we all counted for nowt i' comparison wi' Tony, and later still when thou couldstna leave yon bairn o' thine, not even to see thy sister wedded. Thou'st gey little reason to be glumpy."

She leant her head back and looked at Jane thoughtfully.

"I had thought to ha'e known thee nigh as well as my own sell, but there's things 'ut I canna unravel."

Jane loosened her finger gently from the baby's clenched grasp.

"I would leave trying if I were thee."

"I canna think how thou couldst bide those months up at Barerakes; wasta never afraid? Thou must ha'e been turbel lonesome. Mebby thou wert sae happy i' lookin' forward thou hadst no time to be anxious; thou wert allus braver nor me. But I wonder thou shouldst na ha'e cared to let on a word to thy sister; never a word, neither before nor after. Even now," pursued Lizzie, since Jane had no explanation to offer—"even now, though thou'rt fond o' the child 'tis as if——" she hesitated, frowning, "as if it were wrong for a woman to love her ain bairn. There pass whole days when thou'lt be goin' about thy work wi' never a kiss an' scarcely a look for the boy, and yet thou lovst him as if thou hadst nowt beside i' the world—neither husband nor sister."

Still Jane had no answer.

"Dosta think," asked Lizzie anxiously, "it be wrong to mak' sae much of a bairn, an' to pleasure onesell wi' kissin' it? But 'tis such a little one, this one o' mine. I can mebby learn mysell to do better afore it's big enough to tak' hurt. And later on," she added hopefully, "there's grannie to do all the grum'ling."

Jane stopped and kissed the staring blue eyes of the baby.

"I dinna think thou needs to be anxious," she answered softly. "I dinna think a child o' thine'll live to rue thy love for it, and there's Tom to keep order. But I wadna big¹ much o' Tom's moother! If the next be a lad I'll lay he'll be properly spoiled. 'Twill be worth a man's life to cross him i' front of his granny!"

"It mak's one look at t' warld very differently," went on Lizzie, with the prettiest assumption of dignity, "to ha'e a bairn o' one's ain. I mind the time when I cared na to look beyond t' next Sunday at farthest, and was maistly content to live i' the day that was. But now I'm for ever lookin' forward and planning, and casting up i' my mind what t' lyle lass shall be when she comes to a woman grown."

She looked up at her sister and saw that Jane's eyes were full of tears.

"Dosta never makes plans for Anty?"

"Not to call plans," said Jane bitterly. "I scarce dare look ahead at all, and when I do 'tis more often to wish folk dead than to plan for the

¹ Build,

livin'. What sort of a chance has t' bairn wi' his grandfather always before him? I carena to learn him to talk—'tis good guessin' t' sort o' words he'll soonest pick up at Barerakes—'twill be sport for t' Black Dog to turn skulemaster."

"Why do you bide wi' him?" asked Lizzie hotly. "Why can't Tony and thee and t' bairn leave t' owd man up at Barerakes and live decent elsewhere? Further afield mebbly, where folk ken less o' Antony's fore-elders. I never thought t' day'd come when I'd be wishing thee otherwheres; but if 'twas to rid thee o' t' Black Dog's shadow I wad live as I could without thee, so I knew thee content."

"We canna," said Jane sadly. "He would never loose hold on us. I maun drink as I brewed, and if t' first sip was bitter, I'm fearing t' dregs'll be hardest o' all to swallow. 'Tis mebbly living a while among Christian folk, but I'm fair scared to gang back; 'twill seem sae dowlie at first." And she looked down toward the road, fearing to see Heseltynne ride past the turn of the bridge, and to know she must be leaving. Lizzie, having no words of comfort to offer, could only press her cheek against Janey's arm, and they sat for some moments in silence.

"'Tis mebbly not him after all," said Lizzie, for they had caught their breaths together at the sight of a horseman barely seen beyond the wall at the furthest bend of the roadway.

"Nay, 'tis Jerry, sure enough," sighed Jane a moment later; and, kissing her sister passionately, she ran down into the kitchen to catch up the child and be gone before there was danger of Heseltyn's turning off towards the farm.

Old Mrs. Routh handed Anty his last shortcake; she was too proud to ask that the child might be left with her for a little while longer, but insisted on dressing him herself with her stiffened fingers.

"When next ye lie-by," she said to Jane, "ye can send t' bairn ower to us, an' I'll see he cooms to nae harm."

And the woman answered her gratefully, though she knew the kindness was not meant for herself.

Then, with her bundle in one hand and leading the child with the other, she made her way slowly down to the gate where the Black Dog was waiting.

CHAPTER XV

A GUEST AT BARERAKES

So Jane went back to Barerakes and took up her life once more, drinking, as she had said, the cup she had brewed, but growing used to its bitter taste as the days and months went by. Though at first the change at Scar End had seemed to make her own home even drearier, it had brightened her outlook on the whole, giving her other thoughts than her own sorrows, and making her recall her own girlhood with less reluctance. Since her return to Barerakes her brother Sim had fallen into the habit of calling—at first when he knew she would be alone, but later in the evenings also ; and Antony never failed in his welcome. Here was another step forward, she thought, when a man could be found to talk by the Barerakes fireside ; a man who was no accomplice, and who would not hark back to the Scot or his money with dropped voice and stealthy glance at the well-closed door.

Her second child was born in the early spring, and Anty was sent down to Scar End to live there in clover until after the hay harvest, for Jane recovered her strength slowly, and Anty was not to leave Scar End until his mother herself was able to fetch him.

Lizzie was rather hurt that the baby had not been given her name, and "didn't hold wi' bairns bein' named straight out o' t' Bible wi'out thought to their family or kin. Where's t' sense o' calling her Naomi?" she would ask; and Jane had no answer ready except that it was somewhat out of the common, and no dales-folk would be able to take offence in the fancy that a Barerakes child was using their name.

The hay harvest had been a good one, and their farm had altogether a more prosperous air that did not escape the eyes of their neighbours. Little Anty came back to his home like a breath of spring air, talking fearlessly, and with new pretty ways that his mother traced to Lizzie's influence; for the child had always been quick to notice and follow. She thought of her sister at such times with a rush of love, calling her, in homely symbolism, the bunch of herbs folk laid by with their linen to keep it sweet.

But he had also acquired a hungering curiosity that would not be put by, and he would ply his mother with endless questions, sometimes even in the Black Dog's presence, that taxed her ingenuity to answer or satisfy.

By this time also she had begun to look upon Sim's sociability with another mind. Matt Thirkell's wife had been the first to show her its bearings.

"Him an' Tony's as thick as thieves," said the woman; "nay, thicker nor some thieves, for I think Sim hangs more by Tony than do most o' our gang. I dinna see much of thy father mysell; him and me walkin', as one may say, along differin' sheep tracks, but they tell me t' owd man does not hold altogether wi' Sim's new ways, and wad fain ha'e him gi'e drinkin' and wrestlin' and wenching the go-bye. And Sim he canna hold his liquor like Tony, so 'tis more to be noticed."

Jane warned her brother, but one night the young man dropped word of her warnings under the influence of Peggie's ale, and the Black Dog hurried home in haste to tell his daughter-in-law what he thought of such disloyalty. When she had picked up courage again she tried Antony, begging him not to lead Sim into evil courses.

But she spoke at an ill time, for he came in hot from a wordy bout with Long Tom, and those who were fighting for poor Sim's soul came off losers.

"I lead thy brother into evil courses?" he flung back. "What has made me Sim's nursing mother that I should look after him? Am I to know better than him, 'ut was born an' bred o' decent folk, an' should ken better than such as I, for whom nobody has a good word? So long as Sim has money Peg'll gie him as much ale as he calls for, and 'tis nothing to me how 'a spends his brass."

One autumn night she had opportunity to see for herself what folk had not been slow to tell her. She sat alone in the kitchen, for the children were put to bed, and she waited, sleepy and dispirited, for the men's return from Moortown.

It was the day of Moortown Fair—the Black Dog might be either sodden or brutal; as likely as not Tony himself would be the worse for liquor. Long as the waiting seemed to the weary woman, she had little reason to wish for an earlier home-coming.

At last the clatter of hoofs and wheels startled her out of her sad reverie, and, hastily lighting the lanthorn, she went out into the yard. Jerry stood there steaming in the wan moonlight, and

having satisfied herself that neither man was too drunk to dismount, she set herself to loosen the horse-gear, having put the lanthorn on the wall-end.

She did not listen to the stream of drunken ribaldry that made up the Black Dog's greeting, but when she had undone the harness, and Jerry was making for the stable door, Heseltynne snatched the shafts from her hand and swung them skywards with the laugh of a hyena. And as the cart-end bumped noisily a dark bundle was shot out on the stones to lie limply in the dim light.

"'Tis t' handiest way o' unloading him!" Jane stepped back with a little cry of horror.

"Is't another corpse ye bring back to bury?" But Heseltynne took offence at her indiscretion and made the whip-lash crack and curl across her shoulders.

"Show b——" he began, and would have continued his correction and homily had not Antony interfered.

"Keep a quieter tongue i' thy head for a damned fool" he cried angrily to Jane, but he snatched the whip from his father and bade him lend a hand as he stooped over the cause of the disagreement.

They lifted the body carelessly, half dragging it into the kitchen, to drop it, a heavily breathing heap, on to the stone floor. And Jane, bending over it with the candle, turned the unconscious face of her brother towards the flickering light held by her unsteady hand.

Straightening herself once more she set the candle on the table so that a merciful shadow lay across her brother's degradation.

"Ye ha'e brought him and me to this," she said slowly, her words touching Tony's heart with remorse—a vague, purposeless remorse that faded quickly into anger.

It was the sort of scene that appealed most directly to the older man's sense of humour, and he laughed on, unabashed by the woman's despair.

"Help lay him on t' settle," she said to Antony; and they lifted Sim together, propping his head on Antony's riding-coat for a cushion.

The Black Dog needed no supper. "'Twas meat an' drink baith to ha'e a merry heart."

Steadying himself by the dresser-end, he laughed his laugh out, and grew tired the sooner that neither Jane nor Antony took any further notice of him. Jane had gone back to her old seat by the fire, and

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when Heseltyne went upstairs, Antony went out to the stable to fodder the horse.

When he came back he looked at his wife sullenly.

"Coom thy ways to bed," he said ; "he's too drunk to do any harm."

But she answered over her shoulder, her eyes still bent on the firelight, "Gang thysell, for I'd liefer bide here."

When she was alone she lifted herself wearily and crossed over to the settle. The fall from the cart had grazed Sim's temple ; a thin trickle of blood made a dark streak against the unwholesome pallor of his face. Taking a bowl of warm water she washed the place gently, stroking back the roughened hair and loosening his shirt at the neck. Then she removed his heavy boots and covered him with the old plaid from the door-peg.

Though in those days the vice of drunkenness was winked at with a more tolerant eye than now, it had not been a Harker failing, and Jane felt her brother's lapse keenly. Moreover, she read in the lines of the man's face one proof of those damning rumours she had refused to credit until now, and for the first time she doubted whether her marriage

had brought aught but evil to her and hers. To herself most certainly, and now, as it seemed, to Sim. And to Lizzie, the whole and only reason for the sacrifice, had it brought any benefit? She did not believe it now; Lizzie's own heart would have kept her, even though Tom had backed out of his troth, in itself an unlikely proceeding in the eyes of one knowing the man.

There was no comfort for her as she stood looking down at Sim, unless she could think it must either have been Lizzie or he. And if one, a thousand times better the man, on whose fall the world would look with the kindlier eye; perhaps from its more everyday character. For a man might fall, and yet not be held too low for a woman's pity.

Yet where was the good, after all, in puzzling whether or not she had gained in taking the Heseltyne name? What was done could not be undone; all that was left to her was to try to keep Sim and herself from sinking lower in this slough. The hopes she had had for Antony burned low with the dying fire, and the children she had borne and the child to come shared his blood and his father's before him. She dropped

on her knees on the hearth, murmuring inarticulate prayers, yet feeling relief from her tears, and sobbing herself gradually into uneasy sleep.

It was not the habit of the Black Dog to stir abroad early the morning after a fair ; and before Antony came in from milking Sim had awakened to a sense of his surroundings and had washed a heavy, shamefaced head at the sink. Seen in the grey morning light, both brother and sister showed dark-eyed and haggard. She bade him sit into the fire to get some warmth into his body before they broke fast, and he crouched over it silent and dispirited.

But when Tony returned he raised his head with a wan effort after gaiety.

"I was fair capped when I woke to find myself oop at Barerakes."

"We'd a gey job to get thee here," answered Antony ; "but wi' Ben and thy father gone home it scarce seemed neighbourly to let thee lig t' night in a syke bottom. There was frost i' the air and a sharp wind wi' it."

"And now I think-on," pursued Sim, stretching a leg and feeling somewhat feebly in his breeches pocket, "I am owin' thee that crown for t' drinkin's."

"'Tis no hurry for that," returned Antony ;
 "get summut inside thee, lad—thou'lt feel a bit
 daffly, I'll warrant thee !"

But Sim still leaned back and fumbled with an
 ever-growing perplexity in his bloodshot eyes.

"'Twas safe when I left Moortown," he muttered.
 "I could tak' my oath to 't afore t' Justice."

"What's amiss now ?" asked Antony carelessly.
 "Pull oop to t' table and fest-in.¹ 'Tis ill payin'
 debts on an empty stomach."

Taking no notice of this appeal Sim dived in
 turn into each of his pockets. Then he raised him-
 self shakily by the arms of the chair and looked
 across towards Jane in troubled bewilderment.

"Is there owt amiss ?" she asked, trembling,
 for already a chill of suspicion had settled upon
 her heart.

"I'd t' price of a score o' shearlings i' my poke,
 and the brass wasna mine," he said hoarsely.

"Look again," said the woman ; "thou'lt maybe
 find it after all."

But he shook his head as he felt once again in
 his pockets.

"I'll swear I had it by me when I left Moor-

¹ Fall to.

town," he repeated angrily, and turning a threatening look upon Antony, who shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Folk wi' brass i' their pokes should seek a safer bed than t' roadway."

"'Twould mebbey ha'e been safer, after all, than sheltering at Barerakes," returned Sim, clenching his hand in impotent anger, while the other laughed.

Jane shot a searching glance at her husband.

"I sat by thee all night," she said brokenly ; "thou'lt never be callin' thy sister a thief?"

"Nay, Jane, the mischief was done or ever I landed at Barerakes."

"Ay," said Antony tauntingly, "t' mischief was i' lying by t' roadside wi' a nightcap o' raw whisky."

Jane looked back at Antony doubtfully.

"If Tony has had any hand in it he shall gi'e thee thy money back." And she stood with her eyes fixed on her husband as if it had been a battle of wills with a child who could be quelled by an appearance of decision.

Formerly he would have resented her imputation ; it seemed to her another milestone on his road of destiny that he should hear himself called a thief without protest.

"Thou hearst what she says?" said Antony.
"If Tony had ony hand in it he wad gi'e thee thy money back.'" He opened two empty palms.
"I gi'e thee my share on 't."

Simon pushed back the food Jane offered him, sitting with his elbows on the table and his head in his hands. Antony was the only one to make much of a meal, and when it was over he went out of the house without word of farewell, leaving brother and sister alone together.

Jane laid a gentle hand on the man's bent head.

"Thou'd best be setting thy face homewards."

He gave a groan.

"I can do no more for thee, Sim, and the best thou canst do for us both is to leave me. If thou bide here longer his father'll be coming."

He stood up mechanically, then he turned his head suddenly and looked at Jane.

"Dosta think 'twad be ony good trying *him*?"

Jane shook her head hopelessly.

"Never believe ut," she answered. "'Twad be wasted breath. Gang thy ways home, and if ut teaches thee to mistrust any 'ut bear the name o' Heseltyne it winnot be pure loss."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SON OF THE BLACK DOG

AUTUMN passed into winter and Barerakes fell back into its old solitude—a solitude Jane had learned to regard thankfully.

Since Moortown Fair rumours had got abroad as to the reason for Sim's sudden reformation and estrangement from Antony; and if their friendship had been matter for talk, tongues wagged yet faster over its rupture. An easy, good-natured fellow like Simon would not have turned his back without very good reason; and, though the Harker family were silent as to their losses, they could not contradict current suspicions.

Simon Harker had a large measure of popularity; he was kind-hearted and sociable, his very failings making him an interesting exception among his almost tiresomely virtuous brothers. They, at

least, provided no matter for fireside talk ; they were sober and hard-working ; their very love affairs were decorous, leaving no opportunity for mirth or uncertainty.

Simon's wild oats had been discussed with a spirit of charity, his reform was remarked with an absence of scepticism, for every one seemed willing to believe it would be lasting. And in their tolerance of him it may be imagined folk sharpened their tongues the more readily when they spoke of Antony. We have seen how the unpopularity arising from the Scotchman's suspected murder, though brushing Antony at first, had fallen away from him largely on either side, giving way to his usefulness and former standing as a gay and attractive ne'er-do-weel.

But here was another matter. These unbreathed accusations touched Tony more nearly. Whatever had been Simon's reasons, and whatever his losses, there had been ground enough for him to break friendship with his brother-in-law. That it came solely from Tony's being son to the Black Dog was not to be believed, since this had not been reason enough in the past year to prevent frequent forgathering.

And so it came about that Antony felt in his turn the burden of his fellows' dislike and mistrust, and it chilled him disagreeably—chilled him the more that he had always underestimated his share of popularity, believing himself rated as his father's son and even boasting to Jane of his comparative success in the face of hatred. Now for the first time, however, he was made to feel that the contempt and distrust had become personal to himself. It was a little thing that first opened his eyes to it, and, once seen, it had no chance to be forgotten. And this was how it came about. It was the day of Thordale Fair and the Martinmas hiring; and Tony, passing within a mile of Thordale, had turned aside to see what fun was astir. But even as he came to the head of the town large drops of rain began to fall, threatening to end whatever gaieties had lasted into the twilight. He strode past the ginger-bread booths and in and out among the groups of children. Clearly folk were turning their faces homewards with one accord, for the wind began to howl and whistle strangely in the narrow alleys, and sheets of rain swept down on the grey little town from the head of the valley, where the mischief had been long a-brewing. Regretting he had come any

step out of his direct route, he paused at an alehouse door, minded to have some sort of a heartener inside him before pacing a wet six miles to Barerakes. Perhaps he hoped to meet with some man from Wrathe who would proffer him a lift on the road, but the alehouse kitchen was empty, save for a girl who sat at her ease by the fire, and sang as she knitted.

"Ut blows up for a dirty night," was Antony's greeting.

He took a seat by her side and stretched his legs before him with a feeling of comfort.

"What hasta gotten to thy fairing?" he pursued. "I've landed late or thou shouldst not ha'e asked in vain." He patted her shoulder with the air of a privileged friend and admirer.

The girl moved further along the settle and picked up a dropped stitch. "I shouldna ha'e asked o' *thee*," she said coldly.

Tony eyed her, a humorous smile twitching at the corners of a somewhat self-satisfied mouth. These two were well known to each other, and her ill-tempered aloofness had the appearance of jealousy.

"Dost thou think," he asked, laughing, "I should

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grudge thee a groat or so ? What shall it be, my lass ?—I'll away and get thee it, if there be but a booth left standin' i' Thordale."

"Thou canst save thy steps," she answered, with still the same coolness ; "I want nowt fra thy hands." And she rolled up the sock she was knitting and put it in her apron pocket.

"As thou please," said Antony carelessly ; "but as for me, I wad ask thine to draw me some ale."

She stood up as he spoke, and when she had fetched the ale she set it on the table and seated herself on the opposite side of the fire, going on with her knitting. The table was some distance from where Antony sat, so that his mug was nowise ready to his hand ; he looked from it to the girl and pondered a problem.

"I asked thee to bring me some ale," he said finally.

"To draw it," corrected the girl.

"Thou'st grown turbel sly all at once," he said, laughing ; "I maun ask for all I want another time."

He got up and fetched his mug from the table, crossing over to where the girl was sitting.

"Thou might ask an' yet gang wanting," returned the girl tartly.

"Best tak' wi'out asking," and, stooping suddenly, he gave her a sounding kiss that he judged would end her ill-temper.

But she sprang away from him with an ugly look in her eyes. "Ay," she cried, angrily, "'tis a habit o' thine, wi' more than kissing."

Her look and tone, more than her words, made Antony thoughtful. He let her sit unmolested and drank his ale in silence. When he had finished he lounged nearer the fire and stood warming himself a moment before turning out into the cold ; but he risked no further conversation. And when he held out some coins in payment she did not look up from her knitting, merely jerking her head sideways.

"Set it on t' seat," she said, rattling her needles defiantly, and not even troubling herself to stretch out a hand to stop the spinning money that Antony threw towards her in sudden anger. With the chink of the wandering metal still in his ears he swung out into the dusk, and the incident remained in his memory as the first of many rebuffs, a straw that had shown how the wind blew.

The result of this widening unpopularity was increased intimacy with and tolerance for the Thirkell family, towards whom he had in the old

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days borne himself with some arrogance. Their own isolation did not allow them to resent his tardy and grudging sociability, but it was not to be expected that they should altogether conceal their sense of triumph. In a thousand ways, and with as great a frankness as they dared, he was reminded continually of the ill-odour into which he had fallen among dales-folk. As a man who had been used to cut some sort of a figure in spite of his parentage, the contempt of his fellow-man vexed him beyond mere hatred. To be hated and feared was a sort of tribute ; to be despised and passed by had a strange, daunting effect upon one who, rightly or wrongly, had hitherto held himself to be a marked man in the dale.

He lost his old hardihood, his very gait seemed to give expression to the change by the stooping shoulders and slouching carriage. He was said to drink harder than the Black Dog, but being stronger he carried it better. It is certain that he was one of Peggie's most constant visitors, for it was part of the old hag's punishment that the faithful attendance of "the gang" in her kitchen had driven away more respectable customers, and her house had an evil name.

It was one day in early autumn of the following year that Antony learned there was one soul in Thordale who had never heard the story that had become common talk in the Dale. He was riding a slack rein on the Wrathe road, his horse somewhat heated, and his thoughts of that hazy kind that leave no record on the brain. And suddenly his horse shied at the fluttering apron of a woman who stood at a road-side gate, and Tony might well have been flung but for the mechanical instinct of a man so well used to the saddle.

In the old days it is likely he would have sworn at the innocent offender, but by this he had learnt a certain prudent restraint, so that he looked round to see the cause of disturbance before audibly expressing the epithets at the tip of his tongue. And the woman who shrank back into the gateway, out of reach of the prancing horse, had a haunting familiarity of face that baffled him.

She in her turn looked up at the rider doubtfully.

"Be you Anty Heseltyne?" she called after him.
"Ah! I thought ye'd a look of him, for all ye're turbly altered!"

The horse was quiet again, and Tony had leisure to study the woman more closely. "Is't Lizzie?" he said,

"Ay ; we scarce ken each other, 'tis so long sin' we met. I canna think-on to ha'e seen ye sin' I was wed, and that was four year last Lammas."

"Will ut be that long ? " said Tony absently. He was wondering how she came to speak to him now with such evident friendliness.

" And four year can make a heap o' difference i' folk. I'll not be as bonny as you remember me ? " She asked it a little wistfully.

" Happen not," he answered shortly, looking down at the smiling eyes.

" Oh well," she said tartly, " there's others ha'e gone t' same gate."

But it was not like Lizzie to keep anger more than a moment.

" What's coom over ye, Tony ? Ye're looking right poorly—no like the same lad 'ut I used to ken. Coom oop to t' house wi' ye and ha'e a bite and a sup while ye tell me t' news. I've seemed to hear nowt at all o' Jane these mony days ; and I've been too thrang to come seekin' her."

Tony looked across at the house.

" I'd best be gettin' home," he said sullenly.

" Nowt o' t' sort," persisted Lizzie ; " ye maun give me news o' Jane and I canna bide here, for

I've left t' bairns by theirseln, they'll be doin' some mischieves for certain. Tom's taken their grannie an outing to Weather Field; she's stopping the week-out there, and I dinna expect him back afore dusk."

Antony swung himself out of the saddle and led the horse through the gate. They walked up to the house without further talk, for Lizzie lagged a step behind and eyed Tony consideringly.

And when he was seated by the fireside it was Lizzie did most of the talking—

"Ye maun say what ye think o' my cheese," she remarked, "for I've learned summut i' four years beside growin' ugly!—even grannie would say me that much. And Anty used to be turbel keen o' these bannocks; I could get him to do owt wi' the promise o' one."

"I did not say ye were ugly," said Tony, in self-defence. "Ye're a woman grown, i'stead of a lass, and folk dinna grow older wi'out alterin'. Are those all t' bairns ye have?" he pursued, as a change of subject; and he looked across at two chattering children who were playing on the long window-seat.

"Ay, just them two. Whisht! wilta, Elizabeth

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Ann ? thou mak'st syke a durdum we canna hear werseln speak. Elizabeth Ann, and Matthew, and another, please God, afore Chrisimas. I would ha'e called the lass Janey, but her father were set on naming her after me, and I put in for Ann, thinkin' maybe her grannie wad think more on her for having a touch o' hersell. But she's set upon lads, is t' owd woman, and never took to t' bairn fra t' very first. And if Elizabeth Ann wants owt o' her grannie she has always some tale about Mattha to get her way easier ; she's a sly little lass for her age ; I canna think where she learns her wheedling ways.

"They wad both be good children enough," she continued, assuming an air of parental strictness, "if ut weren't for their father and gran'moother. Tom's moother canna bide to ha'e Mattha corrected, and Tom's just as fond ower t' oother. I tell them I will ha'e my ain way wi' t' next, but I doubt they'll be too mony for me. What can one poor woman do by hersell ? I set mysell to keep these bairns under hand, but 'tis all to no purpose when oother folk let them gang as they please."

Elizabeth Ann had left the window-seat and was clinging to Lizzie's apron, with shrill demands for a bannock.

"Nay, thou canst not be hungry yet ! Well, well, here it is ; dinna mak' a mess wi' 't, and dinna gi'e Mattha too much in his mouth at once. I dinna like refusin' them mysell," she added apologetically, "unless there be vairy good reason."

As they sat over their meal the laughter and cheery companionship had their effect upon Tony, so that he lost some of what Lizzie had inwardly called "the Black Dog look," and spoke more like his old self. And she was congratulating herself on the success of her efforts when the children heard a footfall on the flags and called out it was daddie.

The two at the table pushed back their chairs simultaneously, Lizzie to run to the door to greet Tom, and Tony to stand ill at ease with his father's scowl on his brow.

"So thou'st landed back," cried Lizzie. "How was 't thou could get away sae early ?" She spoke joyously, and lifted little Matt from the ground to reach for his father's kiss.

Tom did not answer. He was looking at Tony with more surprise than pleasure, and Lizzie, following the direction of his gaze, said hurriedly—

"I met Tony on t' road as I cam' back fra Polly's, an' I brought him in to gi'e me word o' Janey."

Tom set his whip and coat on the settle, and swallowed his anger.

"Sit thee doon," he said in surly hospitality; "if t' missus asked thee in, thou'rt welcome for me."

But he could not bring himself to join in the conversation, nor eat at the same table, and he stood with his back to the fire with the air of a watch-dog. And the cloud that had lifted in response to Lizzie's kindness, settled down once more upon Heseltyn's sullen face. There was a felt constraint in the room, and even the children played quietly.

"Ye've not told me owt o' Anty," said Lizzie nervously; "he'll be grown quite a lad sin' we saw him. He and Elizabeth Ann were turbel fond o' each other.

"Ye've three bairns, haven't ye?—twa lads and a lass;—what is 't ye call t' third?—Ebenezer?—Janey's such a one for naming them out o' t' Bible, and giving her ain folk the go-by. I dinna hold wi' 't mysell; ut stands to reason that the old home names are the homeliest. I canna call to mind anooother Ebenezer, but daft owd Ebby Fawcett over to Blairthorp, 'ut drank hissell to death a year ago. Ye'll not ha'e named t' poor bairn after him, I'm thinkin'?"

"Nay," answered Tony moodily; "it was one o' Jane's fancies, and 'twas nowt to me what they called him."

A glimmer of disapproval shone in the matron's eye.

"One's ain son should count for summut," she said sharply.

"Oh, ay," assented Tony, almost humbly; "but 'tis no great odds what name a man goes by, and Jane had some tale about t' right meanin' o' t' word, though I canna think-on just what ut was. Summut about havin' coom through t' worst of ut, though I think she was ower hasty wi' her thanks-givin's."

He spoke with a certain dejection that made a straight road to Lizzie's sympathy and Tom's irritation.

"What's troublin' ye now," she asked, "over an' above yeer father's company?"

"Folks all ha'e summut to bear," put in Tom hastily, and he frowned upon Tony, who, looking up, seemed to come to a sudden resolve.

"There was always my father, but now there's a fresh tale against us, though I swear it is far from t' truth,"

"Eat thy food, man, and begone ; we want nowt wi' thy tales."

"Nay, but I've a right to hear owt that's to do wi' my sister."

"Ut hangs by yeer brother Simon," said Tony. "Folk say (an' he believes) 'ut I robbed him t' night o' Moortown Fair."

Lizzie looked from one man to the other. "This is t' first I hear of it," she said doubtfully. "Robbed Sim ! why what will they be sayin' next ? Hadst thou heard o' this before, Tom ?"

"Ay," said Tom sheepishly, "but 'tis no use bringin' home all the clat one hears."

"And I swear," said Tony earnestly, "I swear it wasna me 'ut robbed Simon. If ye could mak' him believe it ye'd be doin' Jane and me a good turn."

"If thou didna rob him," said Tom sternly, "'twas little good thou did—teaching him to fuddle his wits i' t' alehouse, and to fool away his time bull-baiting an' card playin'."

"He could please himsell what 'a did," retorted Antony. "He was no bairn, to be led against his will, but the same aged man as mysell. I gaed where folk mad' me welcome ; he cam' and went

as he chose. If ut had happed to me wair would ha'e blamed a soul but myself? But because I'm my father's son, I maun stand to anoother's weakness."

"There's more reasons than that," began Tom; but he pulled himself up at the sight of his wife's troubled face.

"I had heard nae word o' all this," she said slowly. "I canna stir much abroad, and I hear nowt but what folk choose to tell me. Was 't much Sim lost?"

"The price o' his sheep—so 'a said."

"And him too drunk to know what 'a was doin'," she went on sadly.

"But he's mended his ways syne," put in Tom. "He's a different man sin' he turned his back upon Barerakes."

"There's oothers wad mend their ways," said Tony bitterly, "if they could do as he did, an' quit it for good an' all."

"And what hinders ye?" cried Lizzie. "If ye left t'owd man by himsell he'd happen improve—I dinna think he could worsen. Why canna ye and Jane and t' childher mak' a Martinmas flitting? If ye want t' brass to a farm's rent there's mony

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'uld be fain to tak' ye as hired man, and if ut were sparer livin', twad certain be sweeter."

Antony shook his head.

"We've talked of it time an' again, but it wouldna work. And if we couldn't do it at first, wi' nobbut wer two selves, 'tis little likely we'se find it easier wi' three childher. I' them days I could ha'e gotten work an' plenty, but 'tis not as it was."

"Ah well !" sighed Lizzie, "if ye canna, ye canna, and there's an end on't. I had hoped ye could ha'e left Barerakes and started anew, but folk's selves ken best their ain burdens."

She leant her chin on her hands and looked out of the window, and Tony, restless under Tom's silent scrutiny, pushed back his chair once more and stood up.

"I maun be ganging," he said unwillingly ; and the woman rose, picking up little Matthew, who was playing on the floor beside her.

"Ye looked better a while sin'," she said ; "an' now talking o' Barerakes has brought back the Barerakes face."

Her tone had its old kindness but an altogether new sadness, this being the first time that hint of trouble had eluded Tom's watchfulness.

This then had been the meaning of the change in Tony that had puzzled her from the first ; she had been shown that Jane had other reasons for those sad eyes beside a rascally father-in-law. She had an uneasy sense of some mystery at the back of all, into which inquiry were unprofitable. A new mistrust had taken the place of her old liking for Tony, but with it had sprung up a pity for the spoilt life of a man that made her hasten to hide her altered feeling. So for want of words, or any more direct way of showing fellowship, she held Mattha's chubby face towards Antony and bade him give his uncle a kiss—a shy, womanly overture that Tony received in shamefaced discomfort at the time, but which yet warmed the heart of him as he rode slowly homewards in the twilight.

CHAPTER XVII

LIKE A TALE THAT IS TOLD

THE sun rose, the sun set, the seasons changed ; beyond this and the growth of the children, life at Barerakes seemed scarcely to alter from day to day. It is true there came to Jane, from time to time, fresh evidence of Antony's steady descent, but she no longer looked out for such evidence, and clung to the last shreds of their comradeship with a sort of dogged despair.

Each day she asked something less from him in order to keep within the bounds of a measure of content. And it was only now and then, as we have seen, that some incident would bring out for her in strong contrast the growing difference between the present and the past.

Little Anty had grown into a sturdy lad of eight, his sister into a silent little maid of six,

fair-haired, and with great, frightened dark eyes that looked out into the world full of suspicion. Ebby, the youngest, was a strange child in whom Jane sought in vain for any likeness to herself or to Antony. He neither laughed nor cried like other children, he turned the same face on the mother who fondled him and the grandfather who abused him. Even as a baby, when misfortune befell him, he would glower silently into space as if registering the wrong on some secret tablet of the heart. And at four years old, knocked down by a blow from old Heseltyn, he would pick himself up again silently, not even troubling to remove his small body to a safe distance. He was an ugly child, heavily built and heavy-featured, his eyes moved as slowly as himself, showing no lights in their even dulness.

No child could have made less active trouble in the world from his time of entering it, and yet as the years went by his mother would watch him with another sort of trouble and misgiving; the trouble of total incomprehension.

"He's no quite jannock,"[†] she had said of him, pityingly, ready to give him a warmer love for

[†] Not quite right.

his want of wits. But as time went on, she had taken back her estimate and had come to look on him as almost a changeling in whose veins there ran no kindred blood to her own.

He seemed to have come into the world with no need for love, no fear of hate ; to the warm-hearted, strong-feeling woman he was for ever a chilling problem. So unchildlike a child awoke a fear in her breast that was half superstition, a fear that may have been shared by the Black Dog, for Ebby's sullen silence had more effect to stay his brutality than Anty's choking fury, or Naomi's frightened cries. And by and by the elf-like qualities of the child, his consistent indifference and unlovable nature, awoke a feeling akin to admiration and respect in the man's warped and distorted fancy.

It was on Ebby's fourth birthday that Jane had a message from Crossriggs that her father wanted to see her. He was a much older man than his wife, and had failed noticeably in the past twelve months. Used to hard work all his life he clung to his old activity, and folk said the last hay harvest had been too much for the feeble old man, who could not sit with folded hands in the ingle-nook

when every one else was working to the furthest limit of strength. It is certain that when the rush was over, and the household had leisure to notice other matters beside the crop and the weather, old Matthew was seen to be ailing, and even admitted himself to be "verra sadly."

His sons had been wont to grumble at his obstinate activity, they had wearied of repeating an oft-needed reminder that he had younger arms to work for him, and could well afford to take the rest of his life easily. Dick had sometimes spoken sharply to his mother on the subject—he had grown to be the stay and head of the farm—a practical, thorough farmer, with all the impatience of botched work that often goes with capability. "Why can'ta keep him i' t' house?" he would ask; "he does mair harm nor good potterin' after his odd jobs. Went to serve t' hens an' left t' pasture gate open—an' there's t' home meadow fair trampled into beddin'; 'twill be the devil to mow."

"Thou maun ha'e patience wi' thy father," she would say. "He's been a vairy patient man hissell, an' mebbey 'twill no be for long."

She herself had learnt patience in these later years—patience and gentler ways. All her life she had

been known for an upright, well-intentioned woman, for all her sharp tongue, but years had softened her speech and made her kind heart more accessible. Their household troubles had touched her more nearly than her single-hearted husband, who had been shielded from knowledge of them when that was possible ; and this had not been difficult, since he had never been one to look out for misfortune, nor had he the eyes that see ill-doing from afar. He accepted such reasons as folk gave him for their actions with the readiest faith. He had been heard to say of a man who asked an unfair price for a cow—"Mebby he was fond o' the poor thing" ; preferring to see partiality in it rather than dishonesty. And people came to him the less readily with tales against their neighbours, in that he was a pained, unwilling listener from whom they could gain no credit as a bearer of something new.

So kindly Matthew Harker had lived his days in a kindly world, and now he was soon to leave it, he had nothing but good to say of it—the lines had fallen unto him in pleasant places. The day came—almost suddenly at last—when he was fain to leave his jobs to other hands ; when his three big sons complained no longer of his useless industry,

and even tried to hearten him to further effort, and pretended to need his counsel on some matter of importance.

"'Tis no use, lads ; I seem to be fair tired out. I reckon I must ha'e done my share, an' maun rest content to be idle."

The greater part of the day he dozed away in the big chair by the fire, seldom complaining, and often even merry, when he would laugh over some tale of past times which he had recalled in his half-dreaming reveries. He would tell such with his old natural gaiety and kindly wit, until the flame burned low once more and the tale was left half told.

Mrs. Harker would try to pick up the threads as she sat knitting in the dusk beside him. "An' did Johnnie no get his goose i' t' end?" she might ask—she who knew the tale with a friendship of forty years. And sometimes he could be helped to the climax by skilful questioning, but sometimes he would lean back saddened and bewildered.

"'Tis strange 'ut I cannot think-on ; my mem'ry's failed sadly o' late."

"The wonder to me is how thou canst keep sae much i' thy head—a man o' thy years ; eighty-one come Martinmas !"

"Thou talkst o' thy mem'ry !" blusters Sim, in kindly derision ; "if thou'dst my empty nut of a skull, thou wadst find t' differ ; I, 'ut canna think-on whether 'ut be market-day or Sunday !"

It came to be a habit of the household to repeat to each other, by a sort of rote, that they thought "t' owd man was picking oop a bit"—"that a bit o' rest now t' haytime was over would just set him oop for t' winter." But by and by they suddenly gave up this sort of consolation, and went about their work with a brave silence and assumption of indifference.

Every market-day Lizzie, having scrambled through her unavoidable duties betimes, would drive up-dale with Tom as far as the Crossriggs lane-end, being fetched by him on the homeward journey. And her talk at such times would be full of congratulation that she should be able to take such frequent holiday.

"I get fair to depen' on my outin' every sennight ; if I saw Tom yoke-in for market and had to bide at home I should feel mysell hardly done-by." And each week, as she said goodbye, the two women would look into each other's eyes and wonder what the week would bring forth ; but of this they spoke no word.

The household had by twos and twos shyly considered whether or not Jane should be given direct word of her father's condition ; but the sense that this would be an open confession of unexpressed fears kept any from speaking their mind plainly. And it was old Harker himself who first spoke of it definitely.

"I feel I could like well to see our Janey," he said one evening. "I mind she canna get free sae often as Lizzie, but I have it laid on my heart to see her once again."

Early next morning Ben hurried up to Barerakes with his father's message. "I wouldna put off till to-morn," he added sadly, this being the furthest limits to which his frankness could go, nor did Jane need further warning.

The mid-day meal over, she set off to her old home, her sad thoughts and fears for company. "But for him it is well," she said to herself, in a sort of refrain. "I ought to be glad he should be taken fra knowledge — that he should die wi'out knowing. And when he is gone there will be but one i' the world who does not know me for what I am."

A comparative stranger at Crossriggs, the change

in her father came home with the greater force, but even since the morning those about him had noticed an alteration.

He had begun to ramble at times in his talk, but he would not yield to his wife's entreaties and go to bed. He sat in his old chair, at times talking, feebly, though like himself ; at times turning dazed, unseeing eyes on familiar faces. Through all he seemed to remember that Jane was coming—sometimes as woman grown, and sometimes the child of long ago.

"Never fear, mother," he said once ; "Janey'll land safe enough wi'out thy worriting, and wi' nowt worse nor wet shoon or a torn pinny—ye canna tie bairns to t' table-leg." He laughed softly to himself and added, "And they be good bairns, all o' them."

But when Jane came in he looked at her steadily a moment and then turned his eyes towards the fire. And she sat by him silently, her eyes full of tears, but fearing to startle him by speech.

By and by he looked at her again ; her eyes met his smiling, and recollection came to him.

"Ah, Janey—thou's landed ?"

She leaned forward and kissed his forehead.

"I had it greatly on my heart to see thee," he

went on quietly; "one canna be^l sure how long the Lord may spare one—our times are in His hands."

She stroked his cold hands gently, but could not bring herself to speak.

"I be right glad to see thee, lassie."

"There has never been a day," she answered, with only a tremor in her voice—"never a day but what I ha'e thought o' thee lovingly in all the years I ha'e had to live apart."

"Ay," he answered slowly, "I never ha'e doubted thee, Janey; I was very sure thou wouldst never ha'e bidden away by thy own will. I oft thought that thy life might ha'e been a happier one, for I think thou hast known sorrow; but we canna choose wer ways. To soom He gives joy——"

He broke off dreamily and looked back at the fire. Jane feared he had lost knowledge of the present, when he turned his eyes towards her aglow with some new strength.

"I ha'e word 'ut Tony is passin' oonder a cloud—folk looking shyly at him for his father's sake. Dinna let him lose heart; a little patience an' 'twill all be past. I could like to ha'e bidden him goodbye, and God speed, but I'm no my

best wi' new faces these days, and a bit maffly at times."

He stopped breathlessly, and Jane whispered that she would tell Tony.

"'Twill all blow over," he repeated dreamily; "he'll get justice done him first and last if he'll ha'e but patience."

Jane raised her eyes and looked at her mother with a strange, sad smile. The justice of the law would have been hanging, and Antony had rather meet the injustice of his neighbours than such a judgment. She stayed with her father until after sundown, sitting by him silently when he dozed, and talking gently and cheerfully to him as far as his strength allowed. She bade him farewell tenderly and with dry eyes, her heart more full of thankfulness than sorrow.

Mrs. Harker stood in the porch to see her go, and between the two there was less constraint than had ever been since the daughter's girlhood.

"Ye will send for me," said Jane, "if I can be o' any service; but dinna bid me to t' buryin'. There's mony folk wad think theirsell ill-done by to be asked to sit doon to eat wi' such as me. I can slip into t' kirkyard after t' rest ha'e gathered,

and if anybody notices they can scarce grudge it to a daughter o' his. Thou heard him ask how things were wi' us—thou heard what I answered. God knows I didna lie willingly, but I hadna the heart to sadden him wi' the truth."

She looked into her mother's eyes with an appeal that was not to be put by, and Mrs. Harker with all her love of truth answered sadly, "And I canna see but what thou didst right."

CHAPTER XVIII

WHO KILLED THE SCOT ?

IT was a bleak afternoon in early November. Jane and Ebby kept house by themselves at Barerakes. The Black Dog and Antony had gone up to the Fell allotments to bring down the sheep to their winter quarters, for the weather until now had been unusually mild and open. And Anty and Naomi had been despatched on an errand to Wrathe, upon which they had taken their own time, and had lingered to enjoy the sights of the town in spite of the cheerless weather.

Up at Barerakes the low-lying clouds and the first bite of winter had given Jane a sense of unsettlement and discomfort which the silence of the house served to aggravate.

The first winter wind seems to have a more penetrative sting than later storms ; it makes its

way into a house with unwelcome freedom, and finding man shrinking and unprepared for its familiarities, whistles a shriller defiance, a more daunting menace, than its later more blustering tones.

All day it had whistled strange threats to Jane's ears as she went about her work dispiritedly, and now, as she tidied the kitchen after her week's baking, its shrill tune seemed to recall all the sad thoughts of her life, and to make its mock at failure. She would have sat her down by the fireside with her work unfinished to have wept over long-past sorrows, but for the chilling scrutiny of her uncanny little son, which shamed her into self-restraint.

It was not that she had to-day any more reason for tears and low spirits than at other times, but the weather added its mite on the side of ill-health, and the mechanical drudgery of her hands had left her head free to brood over trouble it were better to have forgotten.

She had washed the stone floor, lifting the silent Ebby from one dry spot to another, and was now on her knees at the doorstep, a shawl pinned over her head against the biting wind, when the sound

of a footfall made her look up from her work as she wrung out a wet clout.

"Some poor tramp-body," she said to herself pityingly, as she looked at the figure before her—the ragged, unkempt figure of a woman whose broad, coarse-featured face was mottled with cold and whose feet had a tired limp. Here was a woman visibly worse off than herself, who came to ask help at the hands of Jane Heseltyne. She had few visitors even of this sort, for Barerakes lay well off all roads, and she gave an almost cheery nod of welcome.

"Ye've a starved look wi' ye," she said kindly, "and a weary gait. Ye can sit awhile by t' fire and I'll see if I've owt I can gi'e ye."

She was a big gipsy of a woman, and many would have thought twice before asking such a one across their threshold; but there was a look in her eyes that went straight to Jane's pity.

"Step in and sit down," she went on; "I have but to ruddle the step, an' ye may as well wait by a fire as stand by t' door cheek."

The woman hesitated a moment, looking at Jane doubtfully, then she muttered some answer and passed through the doorway into the kitchen, to stand warming her numbed fingers at the fire.

"Are ye bound for Wrathe?" asked Jane, as she stood up wiping her wet hands. "'Tis a middlin' rough road ye ha'e comed and none o' t' banest. Ye'll be a stranger i' these parts," she added, "and ha'e missed yeer way?"

"Nay," answered the woman sullenly, "I ken well enough where I be."

She drew a chair nearer the fire, crouching over it, and did not move until Jane brought a hunch of bread from the dairy with a bit of cold bacon, and put them into her hand.

"Get summut inside o' ye," she said; "'tis more warmin' than owt if one be hungry." And she sat down by the fireside in her turn, and fell to warming her hands.

The woman ate, but not as though she were famished; as she ate her eyes roamed boldly round the room until at last they rested on Jane herself.

"T' last time I was here," said the tramp, consideringly, "there was nobbut men-folk i' t' house."

"Then ye've been this way before?" asked Jane. "'Twill be mony years since."

"Mebby eight year," said the woman carelessly, "an' a deal can hap i' eight year."

They sat silent a moment, as if each were passing over in her mind the losses or gains of the time, then the stranger, nodding her head towards Ebby, who stood regarding her from the chimney-corner, said suddenly—

“Yon’ll not be your eldest-born?”

“Nay, there were two before him.”

“Did they die?” asked the woman, with a certain eagerness that puzzled Jane.

“Die,” she repeated, “nay; why should they?”

“And why not? Other body’s bairns die; why not yourn?”

Her bold, black eyes looked at Jane resentfully, impatient of the pity that showed in the mother’s face.

“Poor thing,” thought Jane; “she’ll ha’e lost bairns of her ain. ’Twill be a hard life and a dreary.” But with all her sympathy she looked at the woman distrustfully and wished she would be going, and the sound of the children returning made this seem the more desirable. At any time, too, the Black Dog might be expected. To see any one warming themselves at the Barerakes fireside would not fall in with his grudging humour, and would serve for a month’s reproaches.

She had opened her mouth irresolutely to hint her desires when the door was flung open and Anty clattered in excitedly, followed a step behind by Naomi. They were both out of breath, and Naomi was flushed and tired with the effort of keeping up with her brother. Her eyes had a tell-tale redness, and her blue fingers still clutched to her brother's coat, lest by any means he might out-distance her smaller and more wearied legs.

Neither child saw the new-comer, and Anty sprang towards his mother with noisy eagerness, his only thought to be first in putting an all-important question.

"Moother," he cried breathlessly, "wair was it killed the Scot?" When Jane steadied herself against the table without answering, he cried again impatiently—"Wair was it? Tell me, moother; they said thou wert sure to ken."

"What tale hasta gotten hold on?" she asked hoarsely.

"It was a great red-headed Scotsman—him they killed for his money. Will Nichols swears he knows wair it was, but he willna tell me, and Nancy Dick laughed and bade me ask thee."

"A said," put in Naomi, "'ask thy moother,

she'll ken well enough.' But I want nowt wi' it," she added tremulously ; "dinna tell me ony more."

For she had listened shrinking and unwillingly to the tale as told by the Wrathe children, and her way home had been darkened by visions and nervous fancies which had made Anty's company indispensable.

Jane looked down at the children sadly, and still did not answer. Tired and disheartened before, this new thrust from the mouths of her own children found her defenceless. The tears which filled her eyes rolled silently down her cheeks at the thought of the malice which had planned such an attack and the spite that had so cleverly chosen its messengers. She had forgotten the stranger by the fireside, and would have seated herself to cry without disguise had not a voice behind her jogged her memory—"Best ask thy father," it said.

Anty looked at the tramp for the first time, and then back to his mother, who had brushed the tears from her face and turned angrily to the speaker.

"And what will ye mean by that?" she asked hotly.

"Nay, what could I mean but that a man gets

out into t' world more than a woman, an' so hears more ?”

A sly, evil smile twitched at the corners of her loose mouth ; she spoke as if she did not expect or desire to be believed, and she laughed when Jane had no retort on her tongue.

“They said t' moother wad ken,” repeated Anty, with chap-fallen face. “I thought mebbly thou'd ha'e seen him thysell, and could tell us what like he was, an' whether he were as big as folk said. Didsta never set eyes on him ?”

But his mother did not answer ; she had turned towards the stranger, and now bade her be moving on, so that she reached Wrathe before sundown. “And ye'd best mak' no tarrying either way,” she added, as the bleating of sheep met her ear, “for t' master may be in ony moment and he canna bide strangers.”

“I'll mebbly be less of a stranger to him,” said the other carelessly ; “and I'll e'en bide where I be.” She leaned back in her chair and, to Jane's infinite terror, began once more on the subject of Anty's curiosity.

“'Tis a funny thing,” she said to the lad, “I was thinkin' mysell o' yon Scot when thou landed oop

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wi' his name o' thy lips. He was a gude friend to me once was McKay, and happen he'll serve me again if need be."

"Is he no dead after all?" cried Anty, with a mixture of curiosity and disappointment.

"There's a mony folk mak' better friends dead or ever they were livin'," laughed the woman for answer; and the child was still pondering the riddle when his father came in from the porch.

He banged the door noisily and stood loosening himself from his plaid.

"Get t' childher out o' t' road," he said to Jane. "T' owd man's i' one o' his tantrums. We'd scarce landed on to t' fells when Nell caught t' wind o' summut tasty—leastways we saw nae more o' her for all wer whistlin' and cursin'. And Bess winnot work for him, though for the life of him he canna help shoutin' an' dazin' t' poor bitch. I'd hae brought t' sheep down hours sin', if 'a'd held his noise."

The two elder children scarcely waited to hear this much before they fled out of another door, but Ebby held his ground, nothing daunted, and the woman by the fireside turned and looked at Antony with something of the same stolid indifference. He stared at her in angry surprise.

"Betsy!"

"Ay!—Betsy."

"What's brought thee here?"

"The hunger I ha'e for a sight o' ye!" she laughed derisively. "Eh man! but ye're changed! wair wad ha'e thought ye'd ha'e lost sae much i' nine years. If ye'd showed i' them days what ye are wair kens but Jane an' me might ha'e lived an' died decent an' happy."

"I ken this about ye," returned Antony, "that nowhere and nohow wad ye ha'e made much owt; ye coom o' a light-heeled stock. And if I'd been ten times what ye say I am, ye'd ha'e been fainer o' me than yon doited owd mate o' yourn."

He spoke without heat, in level-toned contempt that disheartened Betsy until she saw that the shaft had glanced off him to hit a woman. For she had roused Jane's jealousy—the jealousy that will often outlive love.

"Ah, well," she rejoined, "'ut seemed to mak' little odds to ye i' them days which lass ye kissed, and I'se not one to bear Jane a grudge for bein' before me i' drivin' a bargain. 'Twas first coom first served." She turned round and looked at Jane with her impudent black eyes. "An' I hope

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ye are pleased wi' yeer bargain. Mebby ye'll ha'e kenned soom of its set-offs afore ye laid down yeer brass, and ha'e the less cause to complain."

Jane made no answer, but Antony struck in roughly—

"I reckon ye'll not ha'e coomed jus' to gi'e Jane yeer good wishes. What is't has brought ye?"

Betsy shrugged her shoulders.

"What sort of a welcome is it ye give an owd friend ye've not seen these mony years? I coom to ha'e a crack wi' ye ower owd times, an' ye ask my business afore ever ye hear hoo things are wi' me."

"I'm jealous they be none sae prosperous," said Antony, "or ye'd scarce ha'e setten out on syke a fool's errand."

Betsy stared into the fire dejectedly; the fine plans with which she had started seemed to fade away hopelessly under his harsh indifference. She had seen herself asking as a right, and dictating her terms to a set of cravens who would be glad enough to repurchase her silence. But face to face with Antony she fell back on her old submission to his influence; his contempt left her tongue-tied.

"Ay," she said moodily, "me an' good luck be strangers. Fra first to last i' my life there's been nowt but ill hap. What sort o' luck was't brought me to Barerakes, think ye? But 'tis all of a piece. Do ye mind the night 'ut I cursed ye?—the night 'ut ye promised me the flock o' sheep to my dowry? I thought mysell well out o' yon nest o' gibbet craws, and we gaaed away home an' thought to live soft on wer addlin's. An' hoo did it all fall out? The sheep took t' fluke, an' fair rotted away; other sheep we had went t' same road. There was nowt we had cam' to good—they all died: sheep, kye, bairns—'twas all alike; and here I be left wi' a daft owd man 'ut death cares na to fetch while there be owt mair toothsome."

Her head sank in her hands with a broken laugh, then she raised herself suddenly and faced the two listeners—the man who had heard her with scorn and the woman with pity.

"Ah," she cried with sudden passion, "there'll mebbly coom a day when the curse shall coom nigh yeseln. Ye ha'e banked it oop cleverly an' think to ha'e gotten clear while it is but gatherin'. Ye ha'e dammed it oop, but there's hands can loosen a stone. Ye ha'e buried him deep, but there's arms

'ut can grave him out. Ye ha'e kept it dark, but a day must dawn at the last, and a day o' reck'ning."

"Let them grave him oot," laughed Antony recklessly; "'tis mony a year sin' his ain mother wad ha'e kenned him. Thou'rt on wi' thy owd tricks, a-mouthin' an' cursin'; it minds me o' long-past days when thee an' me were younger. A body wad ha'e thought thou'd ha'e learnt what thy cursin' was worth an' where ut was likest to fall; but there's soom past learnin' whether fra good or ill."

"Do you think," put in Jane gently, "we've had owt but ill hap at Barerakes 'ut ye need wish us worse?"

Betsy looked round the room before she answered.

"I'se ready to cowp wi' ye," she said sullenly. "Ye've a roof to yeer heads, ye've food an' fuel to spare; ye've a man 'ut can work for ye now, an' bairns 'ut'll keep ye when ye're an aged woman. If ye can call this 'nowt but ill hap,' what will ye say to me, who has nobbut mysell to look to, and a clog of a donnot husband tied to t' heel?"

Before Jane could answer there was a footfall in the porch and the Black Dog came into the kitchen, his face blue with the cold, and his temper with an even finer edge than common.

A better man than he might have been put out with the day's annoyances, and having come through the blustering stage of his ill-humour, he had arrived at a more dangerous quietness, when he was wont to seek for matter of offence in every one as a means of equalising the discomfort of the world.

The sight therefore of a stranger on the hearth raised his spirits appreciably, for here was an unlooked-for vent for his spite. He took her for one of the Thirkells and was turning over in his mind for some likely taunt, when Betsy looked towards him and his malice took a fresh direction.

"Nay, Betsy!" he cried, his mouth twisting with a smile that left half of his teeth uncovered. "Nay, Betsy lass! Whatsta doin' here? Cant a bide content wi'out a sight o' thy owd sweetheart an' a peep at thy owd home? Thou's surely a widdier coom seekin' whether Antony be free! but thou's ha'e to wait a bit, ma lass; thou'rt ower soon this time, as thou wert ower late t' last."

He eyed Jane slyly to see what success he had and the look on her face stirred him to further effort.

"But thou need'st not to lose heart; aebody's

turn coomes round, if they ha'e but t' sense to wait for 't."

"Ay," returned Betsy peevishly, for so warm a welcome flustered her. "Ay, 't will be your turn an' all, though t' gibbet's gone long a-hungering."

In all the years that the Black Dog had faced possibilities he had never used himself to hear mention of the gallows with decent composure, and it was a sign for his fury to burst out anew.

Catching Ebby in her arms, Jane fled upstairs from a tumult of angry voices, to sit on her bed, trembling, out of earshot of actual words, yet able to distinguish the voices of each in the clamour.

Shrill threat and gruff answer, following each other like blows, with now and then Antony's voice forcing a hearing for itself, to be succeeded by a sort of lull in the storm of invective.

The other children crept out of their hiding-places and came to their mother's side, listening open-mouthed to the fray from afar, the girl with terror and the lad with itching curiosity.

"Will I away down an' hear what's to do?" he whispered persuadingly, but the mother answered by a tight grip on his arm and a look that discouraged further questioning.

Early darkness closed in on the little huddled group, but it was long after the commotion had subsided before Jane could trust herself to creep down the unlighted staircase and fumble at the closed door of the kitchen with her numbed fingers. She had promised to bring the children a bit of supper and a light, should their presence downstairs be still undesirable, and she paused a moment on the threshold before venturing into the kitchen.

Through the closed door she could hear voices within, conversing in ordinary tones, but listen as she might she could catch no sound of any visitor, and she had no suspicion that Betsy was still there until she opened the door and looked in cautiously.

The three were sitting over their supper—a supper evidently prepared by Betsy's obliging hands in the absence of the house-mistress, to see which jogged Jane's newly awakened jealousy.

She looked searchingly at the two men and thought she saw in Antony an air of sullen defeat. In the older man's face a certain spiteful satisfaction seemed almost equally balanced with ill-temper; but as Jane's eyes met Betsy's she read in them the triumph of having gained the day.

"Ye are still here?" she said quietly.

"Ay!" grinned the woman, throwing a meaning glance at old Heseltyn.

"Ye'll find it a dark walk back."

"Ut depen's when I set off," gave Betsy for answer.

"Ye'll ha'e to get word to Jonah soom way or oother," said Antony.

"Him an' me'll be back again to-morn wi' t' few bit things we ha'e left."

Jane looked from one to the other in the hope that her fears and suspicions had taken a wrong direction, then raising her head with a courage born of despair—

"Yon woman shall no bide here," she cried.

"Ay, but she will, though."

"Ye can choose between us," she flung back hotly; "for let neither on ye think I will bide here wi' such as her."

"As her?" laughed the Black Dog. "What findsta amiss wi' Betsy? Ha'e ye not both lived i' the same house, luv'd t' same lad, and bigged on t' same grave?"

"Whether shall it be?" asked Jane of Antony, pointing to the woman with a hand that trembled.

"'Tis no matter for choosing," was his surly answer. "We'se caught in a cleft stick. She

will either brass or house room—thou knowst right well whether be easier coom by."

"Let her ha'e t' mooney," she pleaded.

"To coom back when 'tis spent and stretch oot her hands for more?"

"Then I winna bide here," she said in a choking voice. "I ha'e led t' life of a dog for mony a year. I ha'e slaved night an' day, wi' hard words for payment. I ha'e eaten my bread i' shame an' sorrow, but there cooms an end to endurin'."

"Winna bide here? An' where dosta think to gang, poor bitch? Wair'ld gi'e thee shelter an' food? Or dosta think to tramp t' country that hastna a month to go?"

He spoke in a rough kind of pity that had yet an eye for the humorous side of her despair, but when she sank down by the table to sob in her baffled, useless resentment the Black Dog's satisfaction overmastered greed.

"She has landed i' rare time, has Betsy! She can fend for us while thou ligst-by like a läidy. We'se saved fetchin' a woman, and if things gang hardly thae brats o' thine'll no want for a moother's owersight."

He would have sought in the treasure-house of

his mind for further pleasantries had not Betsy interposed with rude loyalty to the sex of which she herself was an ornament.

"Let the poor fool be," she said harshly. "Ye're at yeer owd tricks—ne'er content unless ye be brayin' summut too weak an' dowlie to gi'e back blow for blow. Ut fair mak's me wish masell a man, if for once I could gi'e ye yeer earnings."

Crossing over to Jane, she laid a great red hand on her shoulder.

"Dinna fash yeersell ower what canna be mended," she said, with an odd gentleness. "I'se no bonny to look at, but I've seen trouble mysell, and I ha'e not the Heseltyn heart to find mirth in a body's misfortunes." But she spoke to a sorely-trying soul, whom compassion touched as nearly as the bitterest taunt.

"I ne'er thought to ha'e fallen so low as your pity," answered Jane, lifting a white face proudly and snatching her arm beyond reach of the other's touch.

"As ye please," said Betsy carelessly; and she stood aside to let Jane pass once more out of the kitchen. "As ye please, lass, but there may yet coom a day when ye'll be fainer o' pity than hatred."

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE NEWS WAS BROUGHT TO BARERAKES

WHEN first it became known that Jonah and Betsy had hired to Barerakes there had not been wanting folk to draw their own conclusions from the arrangement. It was commonly held to prove that the Heseltynes had more money than honesty, and there were some who hinted at further scandal which, coming round to those principally concerned, served to increase the already strained relations between Jane and Betsy.

They were, in truth, ill-assorted house-mates. Had Jane been a better woman, conscious of fewer self-flaws and gifted with a wider charity, she might have accepted Betsy with toleration and turned the position to her own and others' advantage. Had she been worse, consolations would not have been wanting. As it was, she

could neither hide her hatred nor her humiliation, forcing Betsy into warfare in which the more sensitive must always be worsted. Her last child had been still-born, Betsy being the only one who had expressed regrets at the occurrence; and while the mother was ill the children, to whom hard fate had taught philosophy, found in Betsy a not ill-natured guardian.

From that time Jane's jealousy had been two-edged, doing herself daily injustice with those she loved, and powerless against Betsy's unmoved stolidity. The children quickly learned a transparent double-dealing by which they willingly availed themselves of Betsy's good offices, while trying, most ineffectually, to hide their defection from Jane. Keen sight seems ever most busy to its owner's detriment; she could see her children's disloyalty, but she scarcely suspected how she herself had made it inevitable.

As time went on she became less and less a power in the household, for Betsy had ability that made her a valuable servant. Her upbringing had been several degrees less careful than that of an ordinary sheep-dog; never until now had she had the opportunity of learning the tricks and trade of a good

housewife. To Jane, on the other hand, the knowledge that she was a clever manager was her last hold upon pride, and Betsy's rivalry was as unwelcome in this field as in others. It had ever been a habit of the Black Dog's to contend that Jane was scarcely worth the food it took to feed her. But when it dawned upon herself and the rest that Betsy could make as good cheese and butter, and had, moreover, a more indefatigable industry, from her stronger frame, then there seemed even to herself a bitter truth in his jibes.

Little by little she came to share with Jonah the *rôle* of the household butt; a comradeship of misfortune without sympathy. As wife and mistress to her share fell the blame of any ill-luck or mismanagement, while Betsy gained the more praise because it served the Black Dog as the handiest taunt for Jane. With the added leisure Betsy's service gave to her she had but the more time for brooding over these troubles, and nowhere could she chance on any comfort. She looked back on the years of her married life to recognise how far they had brought her—even she who thought to have come to Barerakes with nothing to lose, without a hope in the world.

Hope?—why, she had been full of hopes, if she

had but known it. Hopes that she and Antony might free themselves from the Black Dog's influence, and face the world afresh : an idle hope ! Hopes that their child, their children might win back to their name a new respect—that hope had fled. A hope that she might patiently right herself in God's sight for a sin by which she had never profited, and of which she had ever bitterly repented. But to-day she stood condemned in her own eyes, and with no heart to reach out for God's forgiveness.

Through all these years some hope had buoyed her up amid ever-present misery, some lying hope, without which her life had been impossible. But now what was left to her ? Life would never be happier than now. Happier ? It must become more and more intolerable ; a gradual slope towards death. There might come a time of so abject a wretchedness, that the hopelessness of these days should seem a quiet haven to look back upon. If that were possible, it were better to seek death without further waiting for one who cared not to come where folk most needed him. Thoughts such as these lie near to madness. It was small wonder that Betsy should doubt her sanity and treat her with that sort of rough and kindly contempt that

is willing to ignore rebuff. Betsy had all she wanted and could afford to be generous. Her position at Barerakes was assured, her ambitions leapt no higher. In the fulness of her success Jane's bitterest thrusts had lost their power to sting, and jealousy was but a proof of power. Against so weak an enemy it was not in her to pursue revenge ; and having mulcted Jane of all her privileges, she began to regard her as a possession to be secured from all further ill-usage but her own.

It is a pitiful admission to have to make, but a stranger passing a day at Barerakes would have held Betsy in these days to be the best of the number. Nobody, however, came to Barerakes save such as judged her by an unexemplary past, and she gained no recognition of superiority. Even the praise of the Black Dog had been silenced, since Jane had reached the point of despair that cannot be touched by taunts ; and the household had settled down into a sort of sullen peace not easily shaken, when at last it was rudely awakened.

It was Anty who brought the tidings. Being a sociable lad, and ignorant as yet of any material barrier between himself and his neighbours' sons, he had an ardour for human intercourse that was not to be quenched by mere slights. Moreover, when

freed from restraints of home, he was possessed of so merry a spirit, that dales children were not to be warned from his company by their elders' prejudices. It may be that the stolen flavour of the intercourse enhanced his social reputation, and the heritage of his father's good looks smoothed his path in a way that was unknown to Ebby, whose appearance was grotesque and unattractive.

News of the world's doings was the sop Antony brought home in return for his liberty ; it was therefore with more than common eagerness that he hurried back one bright May afternoon, fearful lest by ill chance another might have robbed him of the glory due to the news-bringer. They were eating their evening meal in silence when he burst in, his face reddened by heat and excitement. "Ye've no heard ?" he cried, with visible relief.

"Heard what ?" asked Antony crossly. "We might all be deaf by the noise thou makest."

"They've found him," went on the lad, almost choking in his throat with words that could not be spoken fast enough. "They've found him, and brought him down to owd Peggie's. I was oop at t' town head as they coom by ; I saw him as nigh as yon table—touched him an' all !"

He paused, breathless, disappointed of the sensa-

tion he had hoped to make, for Betsy pushed him into his usual seat.

"Thou canst talk afterwards, when thou'st eaten," she said shortly. "Thou'lt ha'e to help wi' t' milkin' now the gaffer's away, and thou'rt late as it is."

But he was not to be silenced.

"They say it will all be known wair killed him."

"Wair killed him?" repeated Jane, frightened.

"Wair killed what?" shouted Antony. "Canta tell a plain tale so that a body may understand?"

"They were cutting peats on t' fell top," cried Anty eagerly. "It was Tommie from Park, and lyle Geordie Kettlewell. Eh but I wish I'd been there! There was a big knife sticking up, and it sounded against the spade. An' then a bit o' grey plaid, and the hand of him. He was as good to ken as the day that 'a died; him 'ut has been dead all these years.

"They laid him out on a gate, and 'twas all they could do to hug him down into Wrathe; I'll lay he's as big as Long Tom. He was happed oop in his plaid, and I couldna see the face of him, but I caught a gliff o' red hair when the wind stirred, so I knew it was he."

"And wair was 't?" asked Jonah, his slower wits not having awaked to the suspicions that had paralysed the rest.

"McKay the Scott," cried Anty exultantly.

"They've been fooling thee," said Antony hoarsely.

"A man buried these ten years willna mak' a fresh corp."

"Nay," persisted the boy, "'tis McKay sure enough ; there was many kenned him. Gang doon to Peggie's and see for thyself. I couldna get inside for t' throng, but I heard what folk said."

"And what said they ?" asked Betsy.

"Just that it was McKay ; and how there was like to be a hanging," said the child glibly. "And then I made haste home to bring ye t' news."

"Thou didst right," said Betsy grimly. Then she turned to Antony, who stood like one stunned.

"Get to yeer wark," she went on pregnantly. "Thinkin' 'll no mend matters, and syne we're like to ha'e visitors, ye'd not ha'e them find ye milkin' after dark, and too thrang for a cheery crack ower owd times."

Jane shivered.

"Nay—we maun put a bold face on't. 'Tis no good to hang wer heads ready against t' halter. And ye childher, dinna stand gapin' there when there's t' kye to call, an' jobs plenty waitin' ye ; ye shall ha'e yeer holiday the day o' t' hangin', so ye can put-on till then."

CHAPTER XX

THE ASSIZES

IF for over a hundred years the finding of McKay has given matter for fireside talk, it will be easily seen how the inquest would stir folk's imaginations. Had he walked into Wrathe himself their wonder could not have been greater. The natural embalmment of the peat had for them all the force of a miracle, and was held as an evidence of Divine judgment.

At the time of the inquest the Black Dog was absent ; not by intention, as some were willing to suppose, since the first word he had of danger was his arrest on the Lancaster road with his face set homeward. Whether this absence was matter for thankfulness or regret his family found difficult to determine. On the whole Antony would have been glad of the chance of a consultation, but Betsy held that things were best as they were,

"T' Black Dog were never good to lead, or one to take great heed to t' sayings o' oothers; and t' most ye'd ha'e got wad ha'e been curses an' threats. 'Tis a deal betther as it is, and we' se saved the sorrow o' leave-takin's."

With the finding of the body, folk had thought the mystery of the murder would be quickly unravelled, but the proceedings at the inquest brought little to light that had not been previously known. There had never been a doubt in Wrathe that McKay had been murdered, and the corpse might be said to prove a fact that nobody questioned. It proved also, by the rifled pockets, that money had been object of the attack. This needed no demonstration. That the manner of his death was shown was of more interest than importance, for the Scotch dirk incriminated no one.

The examination, searching as it had been, was singularly barren of result. The former witnesses, who had given evidence before the Justice, had been re-examined without adding anything vital to the story. The fresh witnesses, among whom was Antony, spoke to side issues entirely.

Some excitement was aroused when Antony

swore to the identity of the deceased, and gave account of how he had fallen in with the Scotchman the very night of the murder. He told a straightforward tale of his call at the "Black Heifer"; how he had stopped barely five minutes, how he and the Scot had been measured against each other, and how those who had stood by had seemed to want him to fight the drover, but he "would not be in it." Questioned as to why they should have wished such a thing, he said that the lads had always been keen upon wrestling, and there were some there who wouldn't have been sorry to have seen him thrown; not for ill blood, but by way of showing Tony the Wrestler there were better men than himself.

"But I wad ha'e risked it," he said, laughing, "if I hadn't been pressed for time."

Then he told how there'd been some talk of his father, and a doubt had been raised of his paying his debts in full. And finding the Black Dog outside in the yard as he left the alehouse, he had warned him that the Scot was within and likely to ask for his dues, but he had not waited to see if Heseltyne heeded the warning, being already late for milking. Whether or no his father

had stayed, or at what hour he had returned to Barerakes, he could not say, since he himself had gone out again after milking, and had returned so late that he had slept the night in the laithe, rather than meet his father's ill-temper. When asked the business of this evening jaunt he betrayed some reluctance in answering, and the Coroner pressed home the question with enthusiasm—"What made you so late?" he repeated; and Antony, with the bashful smile of a man who refers to past follies, gave unwilling answer—"I was courtin' i' Black Syke Wood, and we scarce knew how t' time went."

This little touch, and the change of his face when he told it, were trifles that weighed with the bystanders, and won the sympathy of not a few. They turned their thoughts back to the Jane and Tony of former days—the lad and lass busy with love, as the father had been busy with hate and greed. Folk recalled that Antony had never been granted a hearing until now, and the tale he told had a truthful ring in every detail, and was even borne out unintentionally by other witnesses. The sting of peril had quickened the man in him, and he gave his evidence with a careless courage, that

would seem as if it had nothing to hide. Nothing, at least, on his own account, and folk liked him none the worse for his cautious references to the Black Dog. A man, they said, could not choose his parents, yet it was never the duty of a son to go out of the way to hang his father.

The Thirkells told their tale with less show of convincing candour, and notably Jim could not hide his apprehensions ; yet it seemed the simplest course to the jury to confine the charge to the Black Dog and Matt Thirkell, who had already answered to the suspicion before a Justice. And if any more were concerned in the deed, as was the general opinion, the evidence at the trial would not fail to convict them.

Thus it was that Matt Thirkell and the Black Dog were haled to York Castle, there to lie until the time came to answer their accusers. By which at least two families in the township had the range of their interest and sympathy widened, in that the talk o' nights, no longer bounded by their own hill barriers, would stretch out in imagination to the level plains beyond, and the grey-walled city of York.

Meantime, in spite of the sword of doom hanging

over them, the Barerakes household breathed more freely in their chief's absence. Once more Jane lifted up her head and went about as if, when the Black Dog was away, she might call her soul her own. And with her reviving spirits would flash out here and there her old petulance and jealousy of Betsy, though this had the less effect, that it passed unheeded and unfelt over the head of the offender. Since Betsy had gained her point and won herself a position, it needed a strong thrust to wound her susceptibilities.

The news of McKay's finding had come to Jane at so wretched an hour that the shadow of the gibbet across their path lost most of its terror. But as the months fled by towards the Assizes, their comparative peace made her await the catastrophe with less indifference. And when the day came that Antony must go down to York with the other witnesses, there to give evidence in his father's trial, she took leave of him full of a gloomy foreboding that he went to his death.

"Happen they'll hang t' owd man by himsell, after all," suggested Betsy. But Antony had lost heart for the moment, and brushed aside so bright a possibility. "Nay, not when he can turn King's

evidence," he said bitterly—"if the truth leak not out i' the trial."

It was a grey March morning when he set off from his home ; the earth, not yet warmed by the sun, lay cold, silent, and forbidding, and the long, early shadows fell on roughly frosted fields. The north side of each stone wall had its white snow line dividing up the country like an irregular plaid, and the fell sides were bare and wan, nowhere a sign of the spring to come.

It was not the sort of morning that could bring fresh hope and courage to a man who had slept ill from thinking on the chances before him. Antony had ever been a homestayer, his widest journeyings had been to Appleby and Brough Hill Fairs. To ride out thus into a new land, there to be heckled by lawyers among strange folk, daunted the dalesman, and would have daunted him without the further knowledge of his own guilt.

To say goodbye to the home he had all unknowingly come to love, or to which he, at least, belonged like a fern in a wall niche, unloosed the chords of his heart, so that he showed a new and unwonted tenderness towards those he might never meet again in liberty. To see Jane's sorrow

woke his remorse. "Thou'st gey little reason to greet for such as I. 'Twas an ill day for thee when thou joined lots wi' a Heseltyne, and 'twad no be thy loss if father and son were hanged."

But she clung to him sobbing.

"If it were but the Black Dog," put in Betsy, "I'd walk thirty miles wi' a light heart to see t' last of him. Ye say he'll no hang by himsell and will turn King's evidence if need be? 'twad nobbut be sense to be beforehand yesell, and so win clear of the halter."

"Nay, nay," cried Jane piteously. "Thou couldst never do syke a deed; 'tis cleaner an' easier dyin'."

He said goodbye to each in turn; there were last directions for the lambing-time, in case he should not return, and shy parting admonitions to the children, who had never been used to a father's warning or advice, and who listened in open-mouthed bewilderment. He turned last to Jane, and laid his hand on her shoulder, "Good-bye, lass," he said softly; "'tis little but ill I ha'e brought thee, but when I ha'e paid to the uttermost, thou'lt think the kindlier o' me." And before she could answer he passed out of the door into the

yard, and stood to tighten the saddle girth before mounting to ride away. Nor was it of his management that Betsy flung a red arm round his neck, as he stooped, and gave him a sounding kiss. "Gang thy ways, lad," she cried; "thou'lt be back afore cuckoo-time."

Thus it was that he rode out to York in the grey morning mist, followed by the sad thoughts of his wife and the rare blessing of Betsy.

"Ye've no call to look sourly at me," she said to the weeping Jane. "Wad ye ha'e had him gang wi' no luckier word than yon talk o' gallows and halters? We be two poor fools," she said a moment later, "to sorrow for such as him. What was Tony Heseltynne at his best that we should waste hate or luv i' his service? If we could but see ut, thee an' me's less reason for hatin' each other than ever we had for luvin' him, and that, God knows, was little enough. But He mak's women after a strange patthorn."

The slow weeks of the Assizes dragged by, and the home-stayers must bear their ignorance and suspense as best they might. But when the news finally reached Thordale there was scarce a soul in the dale could credit its improbability.

"Acquitted!" was the cry. "Acquitted! when the very bairns ken where the truth lies. Fair doited they townsfolk an' lawyer-bodies maun be, that canna choose black fra white."

The trial had, nevertheless, been a close one, as the gang's escape had been narrow. And their safety had lain in the habit of reticence acquired by the passage of years. Such lies as were necessary had had time to crystallise into a semblance of truth, and were told in no uncertain tone. Thus ten years' practice in evading awkward questions bore fruit at last in averting justice.

CHAPTER XXI

THE END OF THE BLACK DOG

THE months he had spent in gaol, the time of terror and uncertainty, as well as the strange revival of suspicion when he had least expected it, had all served to age the older Heseltine. Close confinement is in itself no trifle to a man used to an outdoor, unfettered existence, and he came back to Thordale a very different being from him who rode out towards Lancaster on the day of McKay's discovery. The unkempt hair that had brought him his nickname had in it more white than black. His ruffianism was more cringing and furtive than hitherto, his temper more subject to gusts of unreasoning fury, while his nerves were so shaken that he could no longer bear solitude, least of all at night, when he would compel one or other of the

lads to sleep with him. At first it had been Anty, but he was soon not to be driven by threat or persuasion to lie with so uneasy a bedfellow.

"He will get oop the night through, and gang stumblin' oop an' down t' room like the devil were after him. An' when he lays hisself doon, he'll be wet wi' sweat and all of a dather, so that the twilt willna bide quiet. Times he will wake me oop an' bid me drive away t' faces that look in at t' window. I durst scarce open my eyes, bein' flayed for my life."

"Thou's a bonny fool to be flayed on a daft owd man," said Ebby scornfully. "Didsta never see in it a chance to pay back the ill turns he has done thee? Gang back to thy ain bed if thou wilt; I care nowt for his dafflin' talk."

And the change was made, Ebby exacting at intervals certain dues from his brother under pressure of threats that he could no longer endure his grandfather's crazy moods. These dues took the form of nearly every available privilege that might fall to Anty's lot—the surrender of his rare holidays at Fair times, the lion's share in any more toothsome food that might be given the children; while the right to lie longer a-bed of mornings on

account of uneasy nights was Ebby's acknowledged indulgence as his grandfather's bedmate.

While exacting these compensations on the one hand, he worked on the terrors of the Black Dog to his own further amusement and advantage, gaining thereby a strange hold on the unhinged mind. Uninfluenced by fear of violence, untouched by pity or shame at the old man's utter degradation, he would play on the diseased fancies of madness and intoxication, until they passed into frenzy. Insatiable curiosity urged him to piece out the truth of the murder from the tangled delirium of Heseltyn's nightly visions; the faithful memory of every childish wrong endured at his grandfather's hands made his rancour pitiless. Thus he would answer the Black Dog's appeals with the craftiest malice, and while seeming to soothe his anxieties would actually suggest new alarms. Hauled from his bed to the window to be asked what he saw under the shadow of the old ash-tree in the garden, he would laugh at Heseltyn's fancies. "There was nowt; what should there be there at this time of night with nobody stirring? And if there seemed a gleam like the moon shining upon a head of red hair, and a wan face under it, why

it was nobbut fancy. Jock Fisher was the one red pate in Thordale, and he a lame lyle chap scarce more than a child's growth. If yon were really a man he was bigger than common ; but it was likelier far to be only a shadow and the glint of the moon on the end of a broken branch. "If 'twas a man, why should he stand there in the cold when he might knock and take shelter ? Should he bid him in ? Should he hail him and ask his business ?"

Thus did he alternately soothe and fan the poor sot's fears until he would fall back on a surer comforter, creeping out to the stairhead to rattle at Jonah's door. "Jonah, Jonah !" he would call in quavering entreaty "Get ma gin ! get ma gin !" For he durst not venture downstairs himself until the spirit had given him fresh frenzy, when, sometimes, he would rush out into the night half clad as he was, while the child that watched at the window could see him rushing up and down in the moonlight, chasing the poor frightened stirks¹ with hoarse, drunken, inarticulate cries. It was told in Wrathe by Clem Fawcett, the shepherd on Blairfell, that, coming down from

¹ Young cattle.

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the lambing shelter an hour before dawn, he had seen the cattle racing to and fro in Heseltyn's high pasture, while holding fast by the tail of the last beast sped a fluttering white figure that wailed and shrieked into the night with no earthly cadence.

A few days later the tidings of a death at Barerakes made manifest to all men that the wicked had been fetched to his reward.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BROTHERS

THOUGH Barerakes had been freed from the bodily presence of the Black Dog, it may be safely said that his spirit yet haunted it, though after no supernatural fashion, as common report averred.

The taint of such a life is not easily cleansed, and, lest its influence should be wanting in after years, Nature had provided a fitting successor in Ebby, who already bid fair to equal his grandfather though not yet at the threshold of manhood.

Although younger than Anty or Naomi in actual years, he seemed almost to belong to a previous generation. His natural love of darkness had led him to piece out the mysteries and shadows of the past, which was for him an open book, at a time when its sins and sorrows should

have been outside a child's understanding. And as the years went by he would draw upon this dark store for his brother's or sister's instruction.

Feeling no need for affection himself, he yet grudged Anty his place in his mother's heart ; and his brother's good looks, good parts, and comparative popularity were an ever-increasing offence in his eyes. Between the two there was very little pretence of affection ; the brotherly relation was mostly contempt : on the one side careless, on the other envious. With half Anty's graces and advantages, Ebby felt his own future would have been assured, yet this fool of an elder brother was content to laugh at rebuffs, was too indolent to press his advantages, and too careless to see his opportunities.

The man whose every effort was not strained to outbid and outwit his neighbour was a fool. The man who forebore to kick a fallen enemy, or cared not to build on another's misfortune or ignorance, was a fool. It was a fool's part to take any less than the utmost ; to content oneself with a shilling where one might have a crown ; to be put off with a smile when one might have a kiss ; to stop at a kiss for want of a little persuasion. In

all these things and more had Anty shown himself a fool; while Ebby must stand aside and see chances lost that had never been his. And when he showed his contempt plainest, Anty would answer with jest and jeer that were long remembered against him. Each laugh at Ebby's shortcomings, each scoffing recommendation to try his hand at the lasses and see whether he found kisses so easily come by as he imagined, was matter for rankling offence in one who, silent of speech and morose by nature, had less outlet for harmless ill-temper than other men, and whose malice went long in ferment before it came to a head.

Between Anty and Naomi there had always been a measure of comradeship, even at the age when it is derogatory to a lad to have dealings with any sex but his own. But between Naomi and Ebby there was not even the kinship of hate; each accepted the other without comment or interest, a flavourless adjunct in life whose presence or absence went for little.

Since the Black Dog's death Ebby was important to nobody. His mother feared him, his father regarded him with indifference. In Betsy's eyes he stood for so much power to do work; a mere

machine that needed a certain allowance of bread and meat to be kept in working order. When the brothers fell out she wondered audibly, as Ebby inwardly, that Anty should use his superior strength so little to his own ends.

"Once give him a right good dusting," she often remarked, "and thou'd ha'e nae more bother' wi' him. 'A thinks hissell a better man than thee, when thou lets him ha'e his way."

Sound advice enough, though primitive and un-Christian ; and there would have been less ill blood between the two had it been followed.

It was when Anty was nineteen that the great chance of his life came to him. Urged partly by his wife's entreaties and partly for his own liking for the lad, Long Tom had offered Anty the post of hired man at Scar End. Among the circle at Bare-rakes none but Ebby could find aught therein save matter for rejoicing ; but he, smelling insult and patronage from afar, decided there was reason for offence in such an offer coming from an uncle to a nephew.

"Like enough thou'lt have to lig i' t' hayloft and work hard for low wage."

"Whatever he give me," retorted Anty, "'twill be

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more than I get here, and more than thou'lt ever ha'e offered thee."

The offer was gladly accepted, and though Barerakes was the barer for her son's absence, Jane's heart was the lighter for thinking him earning his living with decent folk; learning good farming ways under Tom, and separated from the influences that had blighted his boyhood. But it pained her that he came less and less often to see his own home and his mother. Could he not guess how her heart yearned for news, and how she treasured the lightest word that seemed to praise him?

"A good home and a good master'll make a man o' him," was her constant thought; "and a pretty fool I be to be hungering for a sight o' him, when I know better nor any one what reason he has to be ashamed of his own folk and kin."

None the less did it pain her, and Ebby, grown more talkative since Anty's departure, often rubbed salt into the wound by speaking openly what she would not allow herself to think.

"I met Anty i' Thordale," he would say; "but he was too thrang wi' his new friends to ha'e eyes for his brother. I telled him thou'd be fain to see him, but 'a said nowt about comin' ower. 'Tis

strange how soon he's forgotten his ain folk," he would say musingly, with never a word of his frequent meetings with Anty or the messages he had promised to deliver. By one way or another it was not difficult to keep Anty from Barerakes; want of leisure, the distance, and the weather—all helped Ebby in his purpose, and messages from Jane were easily invented, in which she seemed to advise this aloofness for policy's sake. Anty, feeling himself an outsider in his new home, and almost an outcast from his old, clung more in these times to the seeming friendship of his brother, until by and by he grew used to the separation, and Scar End seemed more really his home than Barerakes.

The watchfulness that Tom had exercised over Anty at his first coming gave way to a kindly relationship and confidence; from Lizzie he had received an open-hearted welcome from the first.

It was Elizabeth Ann's habit to say that her mother had a softer heart towards Antony than she had towards her rightful bairns. She said this partly to hear it contradicted, and partly because her own heart was in nowise hardened against her cousin. As a matter of fact there was little reason to be jealous of Lizzie's love and goodwill, since it

seemed practically inexhaustible, nor was jealousy a family failing with the Rouths. Moreover, Anty had mixed with the children's earliest recollections; the baby friendship between him and Elizabeth Ann had so often been recalled in the girl's hearing that, grown man as he seemed to her, he could never be like a stranger.

Between the two there would always have been friendship and liking, but without the teasing suggestions of Ebby there would never have been love. It was he who played on Antony's fancy by falsehood and suggestion, until the old natural friendliness gave way to alternate shyness and assurance. It was he who, meeting the two by chance, made use of the heart-beating word, "sweethearts," and set the girl thinking. The ball thus set rolling, it does not need a man of Ebby's guile or penetration to see the issue; he bided his time well content, but when Antony came to him with an over-burdened heart that must prate of its mistress to even unwilling ears, then for the first time there was talk of Long Tom's certain displeasure. Did Anty fancy Long Tom had no higher plans for his daughter than to wed her to a penniless servant-man of undesirable family?

Then for a few days Anty put force on his own inclinations, absenting himself from family gatherings, and shirking any duty that entailed companionship with Elizabeth Ann, until weakened by her innocent overtures and shamed by her trusting affection, he fell back into the old familiarity.

There had been no word of sweethearting. Under the same roof, often working together, no planned meetings were needed, and the drawing of heart to heart was fostered by the continual companionship. Lacking the illuminating disclosures of absence, they drifted further and further without knowledge.

There came a time when even Elizabeth Ann could no longer blind herself to the truth. It was a Sunday evening, and she kept house alone in the twilight; every one but Anty had gone to church, and he was in the cow byre tending a calving heifer. She sat in the window-seat looking out into the fresh spring twilight; on her lips was the lilt of a hymn that trembled to nothing when Anty came into the kitchen. He stood at her elbow.

"Are they no coom back?" he asked; "'tis long prayers they are making!"

But something clutched at her breath, and she gave him no answer. She knew he was looking at her, but she dared not meet his eyes; she felt her cheeks burning, but she could not turn away her head. She feared he must hear her very heart-beats, but she had no words to break the silence.

In her panic she forgot that he stood in the way of escape, and flew headlong as a bird into a net spread ready to catch it. A moment later they stood apart, well-nigh aghast at this sudden convulsion. Then the man's triumph brought back a rush of courage; he kissed her again, holding her in his arms until the sound of a footfall outside frightened them apart once more, she to flee to her bedroom, he to stride out into the twilight with every pulse tingling.

"Never fash thyself," said a voice; "'tis nobbut me, though there might easy ha'e been oothers. Thou'st more sense nor I gave thee credit for," it went on. "What ista goin' to do now thou hast the game in thy hands?"

"Do?" asked Antony restlessly, for his thoughts had not fared so far as action.

"Ay! *do*," mocked Ebby. "Wilta wait here for Long Tom, and tell him thou'st kissed his dawty?"

There was that in the words that daunted Anty. He had made somewhat of a point of staying with the heifer, though Long Tom had held it unnecessary. And now the unexpected chance of the evening gave to confession the look of a planned attack.

Ebby read his confusion in triumph.

"Say t' word if that be thy notion, and I'll wait thee at the Rigg-top, and gi'e thee company home ; for 'tis not another night thou'lt ha'e at Scar End nor another sight o' thy Elizabeth Ann."

Anty looked at him irresolutely.

"If I tell not to-night, dosta think she and me can bide i' one house and nobody wiser ? He's no fool, isn't Long Tom ; yon crook'd eyes o' his see more than many a straighter pair, and the lie hasn't been told that could blind them."

"Stay then, if thou wilt ; bide here, and say nowt till thou must, and then tell him thou'lt wed his daughter, and hear what 'a says to it. Thou'st felt a horsewhip ere now ; 'twill mind thee o' old times !"

"He'd find his work cut out for him," said Anty fiercely. "And what ha'e I done that I mayn't court a lass if it please me ? A man cannot

choose his folk, but 'tis a new thing if he may not wed where it like him. And for this talk o' thine o' the Black Dog,—he's nobbut my gran'-father, and 'twas never proved that he did it."

"Nor did he," said Ebby, "if it's t' Scot thou'rt on to."

"Hoo dosta ken that?" asked Anty, visibly brightening.

"Because I ken wair did," returned Ebby; "And thou'd ha'e kenned too, if thou'd lain by t' grandfather o' nights and hearked to his ramblin's."

"Wair was't, then," said Anty, coming nearer. "If thou kens it wasna he, what is't thou're drivin' at wi' thy tales an' long faces? If he killed not McKay, 'tis one reason less against me, sin they canna fling it i' my face my grandfather cheated the gallows."

"He might ha'e hanged for the robbing, but 'twas another finished t' Scot."

"Wair, then?"

"A man of thy ain name, and thy father."

"I winna believe it," said Anty passionately, after a moment's silence. "I winna believe it. 'Tis nowt but a pack o' lies thou'rt tellin', and I was a fool to hearken a moment, I might ha'e kenned

thee better. I ken my father is ill liked, an' his father before him, but 'tis a damned lie what thou say'st—dosta think he could ha'e married Aunt Lizzie's ain sister wi' bloody hands? See here," he went on wrathfully, but with lowered voice, for they could hear the closing snap of the low gate from where they stood, and Mattha's cheery whistle coming up towards the house. "Thou'd best gang thy ways home before I throw thee ower t' wall-top for a misbegotten toad 'ut casts slime on thy ain folk." He pushed him rapidly before him as he spoke, with a strength that Ebby made no attempt to resist; but when they stopped at a safe distance from the house he wrenched himself free from his elder brother's grip.

"Wair's castin' ill names noo?" he asked derisively. "Thou that'd be still wantin' a father an McKay had been livin'. Thou asks whether Aunt Lizzie's sister wad ha'e wed Antony Heseltyne with bloody hands?—ay! as sure as Aunt Lizzie's daughter wad thee if she had but the same reason."

Mistaking the cause of Anty's silence, he came a step nearer.

"'Stead o' thee suin' Long Tom, 'twad be him suin' thee; and her to have or to leave as it pleased thee."

CHAPTER XXIII

MOTHER AND SON

NIGHT had wrapped Barerakes in its silence, yet late as it was one lonely woman watched, nor recked how the hours passed in her troubled stupor.

The rest of the household slept, even Ebby's bruised and swollen head was at rest on the pillow ; for he had come home to explain a black eye after his own fashion, and had gone to his bed vowing vengeance.

There had been enough in his tale to take away all possibility of sleep for Jane ; she sat alone in the unlighted kitchen, casting about in her mind for any way of averting disaster.

The story, though vague and loose worded, had

been circumstantial in some directions. The doubt left in the mind of the hearer was not whether or no evil had been wrought, but how far it was beyond remedy; and poor Jane let her terrors roam in a wild field.

Sorrow threatened the two she loved best on earth, and she felt herself powerless to turn it aside, unless, perhaps, she could meet and speak with Anty; if indeed it were not already too late.

When first alone she had thrown a shawl over her head and set off unreasoningly towards Scar End. But before reaching the garth gate she had seen the futility of such an effort; had she been able to fly the household would already be a-bed, folk going early to rest o' Sundays. And, being a weary woman, unused to tramp six miles at any time — least of all after nightfall — a moment's reflection showed the madness of the attempt. There was no good end to be served by reaching Scar End after midnight, to be found next morning by the earliest riser and to provide matter for scandal and talk to half the countryside.

She crept back to the kitchen and sat by the dead fire to make likelier plans for the morrow,

by which she could call at Scar End without suspicion, and see for herself what truth there was in Ebby's story. If Lizzie were still in ignorance she could speak with Elizabeth Ann; and if other means failed she would face her son with her own tale of shame, and win him to her will by her own abasement. Who knew better than she the bitter unwisdom of sinning? And yet all these years had not altogether burned away the sweetness of memory—a memory of love older than the lives of this lad and lass, to whom love was a new, strange thing; too new, too strange, too unproven for them to believe that others had known it before them, though it was to outlast their lifetime.

The thought of all it meant to them sent back her heart with a new pity for the Jane and Antony of other years. Looking back, beyond the spell of the same temptation, she recognised its strength, and feared for these others in their ignorant carelessness.

Then in the silence and darkness there came to her another vision of the past—a vision of the night when she had crept up to Barerakes in the storm with words of the coming trouble to

Antony; the night he had failed her. So clear had each incident cut into her memory, that, as she sat in the same chair, she could feel again the shrinking shame that had choked back confession; she could recall her terror lest the Black Dog should come down and discover her. The clock ticked ploddingly as then, with the same wheezing irregularities. She could fancy that Antony sat opposite once more, telling her she had the devil's own luck, and asking her whether she thought of marriage.

Then suddenly she was her present self, with a rush of pity for the poor lass of the vision. Never again could the whole earth open under her; never again could she tremble before her first apprehension of human loneliness. Death himself would find her more prepared and better able to face him with hardihood.

That night she had chosen one of two ways; to-night how she wished she had kept by her first decision—"I hold it more of a sin to mate wi'out love than to bear a child out of wedlock, and thou'st killed my love this night by the man thou hast shown thyself." It was thus she had spoken. "What's done canna be undone, but I

will take his shame and thine for my portion. He need not hear nowt fra my lips till he's a grown lad, and if he love his mother less for the tale, happen it'll save another lass fra undoing,"

Had the time come when the tale must be told again — told with scarcely less shrinking than formerly, told this time to a man who had not the foreknowledge that hears the truth through a hint, but who would need the veil torn aside with which we cover our sins, that we may live with them peaceably ?

On that night, hard as a confession had been, she had come to tell the tale with faith in the love of the hearer. As she had stood outside in the driving rain she had had no doubts of the man she loved, she had longed to be inside to put the burden of her trouble upon shoulders willing to bear it. But if the time had come to tell it to another Antony, she would speak to a man she herself had wronged ; to a judge and not a fellow-sinner. So far from the common secret strengthening love it might well be its death-blow. ✓

It was at that same window she had tapped, when, from her dark hiding-place, she had seen that Antony was alone. And, as she looked at it,

it was her fancy to see her own face peering in from the wan starlight outside, though there wanted the dash of rain and the howling of the storm to give to her recollections the touch of reality.

She rose and went towards the window ; a breath of the sweet night air stirred the door she had left ajar, and she opened it softly and stole out. Behind the jut of the porch, and sheltered from the heaviest part of the rain, she had waited her time with ever-sinking courage. Touching the window-sill with her fingers she looked back into the kitchen, remembering how Antony had stood listening in the candlelight after she had given her summons. There was nothing to see now but darkness ; she turned her head skywards, finding comfort and companionship in the throbbing myriads of stars in the green roof above her.

Then suddenly she felt herself no longer alone, there stood beside her the lithe young Antony of her dreams, the lad she had loved in the days before she had known sorrow.

"Is't thee Tony?" she said softly, feeling neither fear nor wonder at the wraith. And he answered in the same tones that it was he, not noticing, in his

excitement, that she had called him by his father's name, nor suspecting for whom her over-wrought imagination had taken him.

The dream lasted until she had laid her head against his shoulder.

"Anty!" she cried hoarsely; "Anty—what dost thou here?"

He looked down at her in bewilderment.

"Whisht, mother," he answered hurriedly; "I want nowt wi' t' rest. Is ma father a-bed? and what dost thou here thyself like a ghost i' the starlight?"

Then she fell a-trembling, for she knew that the time was come when between herself and her son there might remain no longer the sheltering mantle of ignorance.

"Thy brother has been home before thee," she said sadly.

When he had no answer her heart sank yet lower within her.

"I will hear thy tale as I ha'e heard his, and God forgive thee if thou hast put shame on the house that sheltered thee and the folk fra whom thou'st had nowt but kindness. Hasta never a word for thy mother's comfort? Let me hear t' truth fra thyself, and dinna leave me to judge thee on

another's showin'. Oh, Anty," she cried, "if thou fear'st to tell t' truth to the mother that loves thee, hoo wilta face God on the reckoning-day? Let me ha'e t' *truth*, and, whatever it be, I can face it better for knowin' t' whole on't."

"What is 't he has told thee?" he asked slowly. "Nay, but I want nowt wi' it either; 'tis easy guessin' what Ebby would mak' on 't, and I canna blame thee for 'most believin' it, when I ken mysell he would darken the sun i' heaven. I will tell thee the truth," he went on. "'Tis months that he's made game of our sweet-heartin'; 'twas an old story for him or ever we'd looked at each other. But as soon I fairly knew my mind he took on another tune, and would reap up enough against me that a lass would as soon set her hand to live coal as wed wi' a lad o' my name. I was jealous mysell that 'twad not be cut altogether to Long Tom's likin', and whiles I wad seem strange to her, and wad keep out o' her road for as long as se'en nights together. And where was t' good on't? If a man drink not at one spring he will sup the more at the next; the dryer he be, the deeper; and that's how it went wi' me."

He had now come to the history of the day itself,

but he could not bring his mind to tell his mother of this last draught. He had not had time to rearrange his ideas of the universe since kissing Elizabeth Ann, and it was too much to expect he should discuss the fact with another. He went on haltingly—

"He was outside—spying. I kenned his foot and went out to him. 'Twas in my head he wad threaten me wi' Long Tom, but he'd summut 'ut pleased him betther. I ken well enough that he lies, an' yet I canna rest for thinking on't, nor I durstn't meet—them—wi'out seein' thee."

There was a moment's silence.

"Moother," he said impatiently, "tell me it was all lies, and I'll away back before they find me wanting."

"What said he?" she asked, with dry lips.

"He said they might ha'e hanged t' Black Dog for theft, but no for murder. He said he kenned wair it was 'ut killed the Scot," he whispered breathlessly, trying to read his mother's face in the light of the scarce-risen moon. But she stood before him like a pillar of stone, and though he waited for her to speak she made no comment.

"He said he kenned wair it was," he re-

peated hoarsely ; and he put his hand on her shoulder.

"He wad ha'e had me believe it was a man o' my own name and my father."

He felt her trembling, and the sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Is't true what 'a says ? Nay, but I will know the rights on 't, if I have to choke it out o' the man himsell. Is 'ut true ?"

He held her by both shoulders, and forced her to meet his gaze.

"Ay, God help thee, 'tis true enough," she moaned.

"How comes it, then, he could win through the trial and no one suspect him ?" cried the lad despairingly. "He'd sure ha'e been found out."

"Folk will lie bravely to save their necks," said Jane brokenly. "And his father was most to blame when all's said an' done. 'Twas his father that planned ; Tony nobbut slipped into 't."

Anty dropped his hands heavily to his sides and stood apart.

"If this be true," he said, laughing recklessly, "he'll mebbly ha'e spoken wiser than I thought i' other matters, for this is nobbut the half o' his ditty."

"Seein' me the kind o' man 'ut canna ask for a lass honestly, he was for showin' me other ways—ways 'a said that ma father had tried before me, and found to answer. Nay, 'a went further, did Ebby; 'a said it wad then be a matter for my choosin' whether I took her or left her; and that I mysell might still be wantin' a fater if McKay had been livin'. I did him a wrong it seems," he went on, looking down curiously at the shrinking woman; "I set my mark on his face, when I should ha'e been thankin' him for his counsels."

"Where arta goin', Anty?"

"Where am I goin'? Where should I be goin' but along t' gate oothers ha'e planned for me? Back to Scar End and Elizabeth Ann and for owt I know to the devil."

"Nay" she answered, laying her hand on his arm, "thou hast the right and the power to choose thy ain gate—never put the blame upon oothers. And if thou call'st thyself a man, look to it that thou hast pity on the weak, and that thou bring not dishonour to any that trusted thee. I was thinkin' to tell thee the tale myself 'ut thou hast fra oother lips, and 'tis but a little part thou hast heard, or 'twad surely ha'e brought thee a different

message. For the sin is soon named, but the tale o' its payment will never be told, nor a tithe on 't. Thou'rt a man grown, Anty; it'll look long to thee sin' thou wert a lyle lad, but my sorrow is older than thou art, and I was not thy age when I kenned the weight o' my burden. Thou'lt tell me I've had nowt but my deserts, nor will I deny it; and yet wi' this harvest before thy eyes thou wouldst scatter the same seed broadcast!"

"What wouldst thou have?" he asked sullenly. "The branch is no better than the tree fra which it springs." But he went his way back to Scar End to take up his life from a new standpoint.

Jane watched him down the hill until he passed out of sight into the shadow; she had fought and won, even in her utter weariness she knew herself freed from fear.

"God asks no more," she said slowly, "fra such as ha'e nowt to give."

Anty left Thordale for a time, to come back after many years with empty pockets, when folk had well-nigh forgotten him, and Elizabeth Ann's lips had ceased to curl at the mention of his name.

And when they spoke in her hearing of the present Antony Heseltyne, of the failure he was, and the chances he had thrown away, she shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. But she held her peace as to one of his lost chances, despising him most wherein he had least deserved it.

AFTERMATH

THE landlord had finished his tale and we sat looking into the dying fire. After a while he relit his pipe and puffed at it steadily.

"A grim old tale," I said at last.

"It is that."

"And you think it true?" I queried.

"True?"

"You think there really was such a man as McKay or the Black Dog? It isn't just a fire-side tale for winter nights?"

He smiled a little as he pressed down the tobacco in his pipe-bowl.

"True or not," I went on, "it's a good tale, and I'm glad to have heard it."

He looked at me quietly; his beard and moustache hid his lips, but it seemed to me that his eyes twinkled.

"It tells better of a wild night wi' t' wind howlin' i' t' chimney, and t' snaw drivin' in oonder t' door crack. 'Tis as ye say, a tale for a winter's night. Ye wad hear a bit of a noise last night after closing-time?" he asked, eyeing his pipe with the same thin affectation of solemnity; "I was sorry ye should be disturbed, and 'tis not often it haps i' my house."

"There was rather a row," I admitted; "but I didn't trouble myself about it. What was the matter?" I added, for I thought he seemed anxious to explain.

"There was a good few i' t' tap-room; an' a lot o' lads together like that, they get heated wi'out onything more. They get drinkin', and, wi'out bein' what you might call fresh, they've a deal more to say than is any wise profitable. And when all speak at once 'tis a case o' the strongest lungs. They took to tellin' owd tales—winter tales."

He looked at me impressively.

"I wasn't i' t' bar at the time, or I dinna hold wi' such ways."

"You tell tales enough yourself!"

"There be tales and tales; and when ye've gotten

a good tale 'tis not to say it wad suit just every one. Folk should use their judgment. Now a tale such as yon 'tis well enough, as you say, on a winter's night, for a few by t' fireside and t' door shut, but 'tis nowt for a tap-room. If they hadn't been a bit cheerful-like they wad never ha'e started wi' it, and when I heerd what they were on to I was jealous how it wad end. There was a good few on 'em in ; soom hay-timers on spree, and a lad or two fra down dale. And so long as they could keep to the prices at Appleby Fair and t' hay crop, there was no bad blood. But they got disagreein' ower summut, and Jack (him 'ut drove ye oop fra t' station)—Jack maun needs drag the Scotsman into the business, by way makin' hissell pleasant to Anty Heseltyne."

"Anty who ?"

"Anty Heseltyne ; they still keep to t' owd name. As I was sayin', there was Joe and Anty fra Barerakes, and Jack had no more sense than to set on baitin' them about their fore-elders. I knew how it wad end ; I tried to get Jack to gi'e us a song by way o' keepin' him quiet. But he was past singin', was Jack ; and Anty angered him again wi' laughin' at him. Anty's a turbel good hand

at a song hisself, and he knows what's what. Things got past mendin' i' no time. Heseltynes were all the madder that there were two of their own hay-timers to join in the laughin'. 'Twas near closin'-time onyway; I let them blow off for a bit, and then I said, 'Now, gentlemen—out you go!' If there was to be broken heads 'twas roomier and every way handier oot o' doors."

"Did they go?"

"Ay! they went. Ye ha'e what ye call a chucker-out i' towns, but I manage these things mysell. By the time I'd shut t'door on the lot o' them, and had setten things a bit straight, I could hear there was summut loose outside; but when I cooms round t' house-end (having gone out by t' back way) they were movin' off down town, Joe and Anty havin' took to their heels, bein' nobbut two by theirseln. If ye meet Joe he's good to ken by a black eye. I ha'ena seen Anty syne, but they say he was fairly mauled."

"And all about a Scotch drover," I said, "who's been dead these hundred years!"

"Ay, and they canna forget it."

"But it's very unfair," I urged. "How can they help what their forefathers did? Besides, if it

comes to that, there must be plenty more who have undesirable grandfathers."

"Ay! that's what I say myself. That's why I've never fashed mysell to mak' out a family tree. As like as not I might be sib to t' Black Dog on the spindle side; and I'll lay he's no been the only dalesman that has taken a life for brass. But sense or none, things are as they are. Heseltynes are no ill liked in the main, but as soon as there's any differin' 'tis McKay i' their teeth. There was one o' them went on a trip to Newcastle, the time Barnum's Show was round. He an' Jimmy Pratt were sweetheartin' two sisters, an' he was for treatin' his girl to all the side-shows, an' made sport o' Jim, who was always a trifle greedy. That riles Jim; 'a canna bide to be thought near because 'a knows it is true; so 'a oop an' tells Heseltyne that the bit brass he had were earned by the sweat o' his brow, not picked off a dead Scotsman! And there would be little enough of that when all was divided. I often wonder they should bide in a place where aebody kens the story. If it had been myself I think I'd ha'e shifted into a town whar folk kenned nowt o' my fore-elders. But happen they're used by now and think the less to it."

Next morning, as soon as I had swallowed my breakfast, I went out into Wrathe to make observations. Down the little grey street I strolled, gaping about me at long-familiar objects with the air of a Manchester tripper. "Here," I said to myself, "might have stood the 'Black Heifer,' Peggie's unpretending hostel, from which the Scot had gone out, and whither he had returned after many days." Few folk were about; man having gone forth to his labour, and woman being busy with household concerns; but under the shadow of the market cross a lad and a lass had stopped for a word of greeting, and I chose to fancy them Jane and Antony as they met by chance on the morning before the murder.

I held to the north side of the grey-towered church, passing out of Wrathe by the lane along which the Scotchman was decoyed in the autumn gloaming. The air was sweet with the scent of cut hay; from the open windows of the schoolroom came the droning chant of the multiplication table. (It is the children's last day of captivity, for next week hay-time sets in in good earnest.)

In the hot July sunshine, with the sights and the scents of summer all around me, the tale seemed as little credible as the nip of a winter's frost. "It

was here he would meet his death." But the larks piped "Never believe it ; should we be singing here if that were so ?"

I went along the lane, slowly, until I came to a barn on the right-hand side—a commonplace barn enough, but I paused to look at it. It was here they had brought the corpse ; through that open door Betsy had stolen to feel, in the darkness, for what she could not see. And as I was turning away some scrawled red letters on the barn wall caught my eye—"Anty Heseltyne," I read ; and I must have said it aloud, for a voice from within gave answer.

Wanting the courage to run away, I stayed like a stopped clock.

"What is't ?" he repeated, and there stood in the doorway a man, big-limbed as Tony of old. He had a halter in his hand and only kept clear of the lintel by bent shoulders.

"Nothing," I said ; "I didn't know you were in the barn," and I pointed to the writing on the wall.

"Ah," he laughed, "so that's hoo ye ken my name. I wondered how a tripper should ha'e gotten hold on't. Ye'll be goin' to see yon waterfall," he went on, with the air of one who had learnt the race

thoroughly. "Keep on past t' mill, and ower t' lyle brig, and there's a path along t' wall-side tak's ye straight to t' forss."

I thanked him humbly, though it saddened me to be called a tripper.

He wore his cap jauntily over one ear, but it did not altogether hide a half-healed graze on the temple. I was thinking that Jack would not have cared to have tackled him single-handed, but I said aloud that the weather was fine for the hay—this by way of showing him that even a tripper has notions on agriculture.

"Ay," he said grudgingly. "Ay, and 'tis a right sort o' day for sightseein'."

"Hot?" I suggested.

"Not for such as ha'e now't to do!"

"Past the mill, over the bridge, and up the wall-side," I repeated sleepily.

He closed the barn door and came into the lane.

"I'll set ye a bit; I'se goin' that way mysell," he said good-naturedly; and I understood in a flash how he rated my town intellect. A three-year-old child or a blind fiddler could scarcely have missed the path.

We walked side by side, and he told me of sights

that every tripper should see—of waterfalls set ready for their entertainment, where paved walks and stone benches awaited their convenience, and nature was made accessible to patent-leather foot-gear.

“We’ve all sorts coom i’ summer, and there’s t’ shooters i’ t’ Back End and t’ fishers at Easter, but let winter coom and we ha’e t’ place to werseln. Ye’d not like here i’ winter.”

I saw it would be useless to contradict him. We passed by the mill; my friend the white kitten fluffed out her tail to impose upon Heseltyn’s dog. The saw was merrily singing over its work, the air smelt of fresh-cut deal, and the yard was littered with hay-sleds and rakes now that hay-time was imminent.

He stopped at the mill-house corner.

“Yon’s t’ brig and up yonder’s the path, and I wish ye good mornin’. If ever ye venture up on to t’ fell and chance to pass Barerakes call in for a glass o’ milk.”

He passed under the mill-runnel and I went on towards the bridge where Jane and Antony had “wished” in their childhood. The stream ran under it, babbling of the men who had come

and gone. I listened awhile, and then cast about in my mind for a wish wherewith to prove the stone's magic :

Let the time be soon when a man shall be judged on his own merits, and not on a "winter's tale," for sins that never were his and are out of his power to alter.

And as I looked up the hillside I saw the man wave once more towards Black Syke Forss, and I followed the path at his bidding.

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